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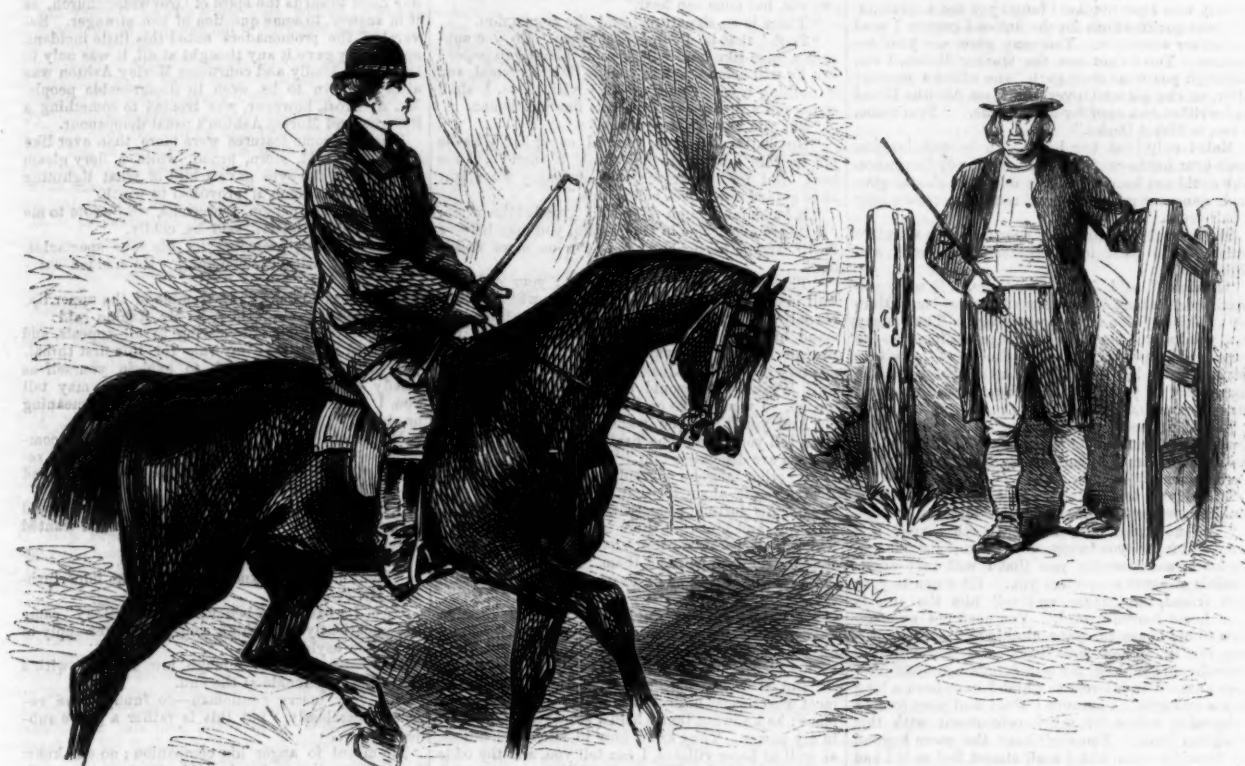
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[ABIATHA BRINGS NEWS OF RUTH WESTON.]

THE FLAW IN THE DIAMOND.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Miss Arlingcourt's Will," "Leaves of Fate," &c. &c.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"It is too intricate a snarl for one poor brain to unravel," he muttered at length. "I will cease to fret myself by trying to see the end. A step at a time is enough for the little child; why not for such a groper as I? There are two moves directly at hand, and it is enough to attend to them. This poor child must have the protection of the great man of the shire, and Ruth Weston must be brought to a meeting with that unsuspecting boy."

And as if this resolution had relieved his mind, he turned, and went up softly to his chamber, where first, un-Quakerlike, he examined carefully the pistols concealed in a secret drawer, then he knelt down, and was for a long time motionless in the sacred silence of prayer.

The stars looked down peacefully, and kept solemn watch all the night through. Abiatha followed them with wakeful eyes, through his unshrouded window, until the flushes of the dawn were stealing into the eastern sky. Then he fell asleep, and Mabel called twice, saying that breakfast was ready, before he replied.

"You have heard and seen nothing?" he asked.

"No. There was a lame man passed a little while ago, but he did not look this way."

"A lame man! did he have a dry, hacking cough?"

"Now I think of it, I believe I did hear him cough," she answered.

Abiatha nodded his head.

"He is one of the guests down at the inn. My child, the wolf is abroad. Let us not be deceived, though he comes in sheep's clothing."

"What are we to do?" asked the girl.

"We are to go down to Ashton Villa at once. Heaven send that Lady Constance has not obtained

her companion. To have these safely there under such powerful protection will be worth half the battle to me just at this juncture."

"I will go at once," said Mabel, crossing the room promptly, and taking up the Quaker bonnet and shawl. "Oh, sir, I cannot bear to think I am bringing you also into danger. And it gives me a sudden home-sickness to think of leaving you."

"We must try to meet occasionally. I think they would often send a carriage with thee, but thou must never venture alone on foot—that prowling wolf will be vigilant, and it will not do to be off guard until he is caged or muzzled. Please heaven we shall see that last happen yet."

He was putting on his hat and gloves while he was speaking. Mabel, very still and calm in outward appearance, although she could feel the nervous fluttering of her heart, took his arm when she saw that he was ready.

"I would rather have stayed to arrange your rooms before I left them," she said, in a faltering voice, glancing back while he took out the key.

"Thou knowest I am not the poorest housekeeper in the land," he returned, playfully. "I should not allow a far more weighty reason to detain us a moment. The streets are well-thronged at this hour by the hands passing to the mills, and the various workmen on their way to their employment. If it be too early for my lady, we can wait there better than here."

It was too early for Lady Constance, but the footman informed them she would see the young woman in her boudoir as soon as she had breakfasted.

Mabel and Abiatha Broad sat quietly in the little waiting-room, and made many arrangements for farther meetings, in case the former remained at the villa. They had so many parting-words to say, that the time did not seem long, and when the summons came for her to ascend to her interview with Lady Constance, the girl's lip quivered as she whispered:

"Whatever becomes of it, heaven bless you for ever for your goodness to me."

Lady Constance, rather pale, but looking, as usual, extremely elegant and lovely, was reclining on the

sea-green couch in the boudoir, a white cambric morning dress flowing down in graceful folds over the tiny, green satin slippers, green ribbons fluttering from the tiny lace cap, and a scarlet cluster of tropical blossoms knotted at her breast.

The lady's maid stood behind, like any Eastern sultana's attendant, with a fan of ostrich feathers in her hand, and a pretty page, in green and silver livery, was just carrying away a silver tray.

Mabel did not lose the beauty of the picture, and instinctively smiled in unaffected pleasure.

Lady Constance, who did not think it beneath her dignity to make a charming picture for a dependant, caught the sparkle of her eye under the deep brim of the Quaker bonnet, and was immediately prepossessed in the young woman's favour.

She motioned towards a chair.

"Take a seat, if you please. Dawson tells me you have come in answer to my advertisement. Will you be so good as to remove your bonnet?"

The lady was conscious of a thrill of surprise, as the pale beautiful face of the new applicant was presented to her view.

"She is a lady—a perfect lady," was her inward comment. "I know I shall lose a jewel if I do not secure her."

And aloud she added, with a change of tone which Mabel gratefully detected, no longer that of a mistress to her subordinate, but of one lady to another:

"It is a pleasant companion I desire most ardently—one good-natured enough not to tire of the peevishness of illness, and especially an agreeable reader. My eyes are weak, and I use them very sparingly, but I am still anxious to keep up with the current literature. There is a new poem there, in that monthly, which I have been waiting impatiently to hear. Will you be so good as to read it to me now? You will find the mark in it."

Mabel found the book, and read the poem with the clear, appreciative intonation of a fine taste.

"Oh!" said Lady Constance, with a deep drawn breath, "there is no question about it; you must stay with me, and you will ward off, I am sure, half the trial of this ailment of mine."

She stated the terms which she had arranged, and added, eagerly, that she should not mind making them more generous for such superior services as she felt sure she was now to receive.

"You are very kind, very kind, indeed," faltered Mabel, deeply touched by her ladyship's interest. "I only hope I shall be able to retain your confidence. You have asked nothing farther about my qualifications, nor for my recommendation."

"True," answered Lady Constance; "I am aware that I have made a most unbusinesslike affair of it, but the fault is with you, my dear, who have so completely won upon me that I forget you are a stranger. Of your qualifications for the duties I require I need no farther assurance. You may give me your reference. You do not use the Quaker dialect, I see, although you wear their garb," she added a moment after, as she glanced over the lines Abiatha Broad had written on a card for Mabel's use. "Your name, I see, is Mabel Darke."

Mabel only bent her head. An intense longing came over her to confide her story to Lady Constance. She could not bear that this noble lady should give such generous protection, and receive in return only a half-truth.

She turned her glistening eyes from the attentive waiting-maid back to the gracious mistress, and sighed softly.

"Dawson," said Lady Constance, "I wish you would see that my dinner-dress has new laces. Morley criticised those I wore yesterday. That is my son, you know," she added, in a proud tone, as the woman disappeared; "he has the most fastidious taste about such things. But I thought I read in your face that you had something you did not wish to say before Dawson."

"I had, indeed, your ladyship. I cannot bear to come to you without telling you that I have taken the name of Darke to conceal my true identity from a cruel enemy."

Then Mabel told her story, that is as much as she could tell without compromising Abiatha.

"You need not fear, dear child, that your sad story will injure you in my estimation. I honour you the more, and I assure you that I will take every possible measure to protect you. Go down to your kind friend, the Quaker, and tell him that this is your home henceforward. You need not even go back to his house for your clothing; I will send a man for it. Then come back, and we will talk over the programme for our future course. You have aroused an interest in which I have been a long time a stranger. I am sure I shall find your society a charming solace for my imprisonment with this rebellious limb. You shall have the room beyond my dressing-room, and I shall almost feel as if I had a daughter."

"Heaven is very kind now," returned Mabel, and she went down to take leave of Abiatha with a lightened heart.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. A. FROST had certainly found his way to Chardon Valley. He was there at the inn, limping across the portico, and coughing in that dry, disagreeable fashion of his, taking due notice of every arrival, whether at the taproom, or the little traveller's parlour. He had a companion with him who carried a sketch-book, which was the ostensible reason for his hanging about the highway, and coming out at all sorts of odd nooks near private dwellings, but though, whenever people came up to reconnoitre, they found him working away with a great deal of earnestness, somehow the sketches kept about at the same point all the time.

Mr. Frost was an inquisitive individual, mine host declared. It was nothing extraordinary that he had much to ask about Mr. Morley Ashton, his tastes, and habits, but when he began to question about the Quaker, who lived so quietly in the outskirts of the village, the landlord lost his patience.

"I don't spend my time searching into my neighbours' affairs," he replied, indignantly. "The most I can tell you about Mr. Broad is, that no one ever knew any harm of him."

Mr. Frost subsided after this rebuke, but he scraped acquaintance with the stable-boy, and by gift of a few extra shillings, won that simple fellow's subservience, and obtained from him more accurate information than the landlord could have given. But he was sorely puzzled and lost in a tangle of perplexity, which hardly seemed called for by honest Abiatha Broad's simple, matter-of-fact way of life.

"There's a mystery about it," quoth Mr. A. Frost, discontentedly, over and over to himself. "I know, if only I could put my finger on the right loop, it would all slip out, smooth and straight, and I could read the meaning. Who is this Quaker? And why is he troubling himself to mix in the affair?"

His companion was not so cool in the matter. The

little room in the inn might have told of sundry fierce tempests of passion, and frantic ebullitions of defeated rage.

Morley Ashton had met these strangers, both of them, in the street, and once at the inn. Each time he had passed them without a word or look of recognition. Nevertheless, Mr. Frost came one night to his companion, and showed triumphantly a short note in the handwriting of Mr. Ashton.

"I will hear what you have to offer. I shall walk to-night alone on the bridge by the lower gate. The whole is in sight of the promenade, where the people can see, but none can hear."

"There is no signature," said the companion. "Pooh! that is of no consequence. Do you suppose a man like him will commit himself to paper? But he will come. I tell you he is frightened, and if nothing better comes of this visit here, I shall wring out a pretty sum from this fine gentleman."

"But you haven't the proofs!"

"No matter. I have guessed enough. What is his terrible anxiety to find Ruth Weston? Curse her! But for her treacherous obstinacy we might have gained our object before this."

"It looks far enough off, now!" growled the other; "if things ever come in train again, you may believe I will carry a high hand, and have no more dallying."

"They will come, never fear that; your girl is as well in one place as another, for while she is so, that we only know where the place is. Can't a father demand his daughter? If only that one about the woman had led anywhere—if I could get at the mystery of how this Quaker tampered up—and where Ruth Weston is, it would be all I'd ask to be done for me. I would take care of the rest myself."

"And you'll try the game on this Mr. Ashton? I can tell you it won't be healthy for you, if he finds out you are deceiving him."

The other laughed contemptuously.

"Leave me alone for that. The man would give me half his fortune to-morrow rather than have me go about, and hint that there is a certain lady dead, which their paragon cannot look back upon without trembling. I understand them."

"I should like to be in hearing of your talk with the grand gentlemen. It would be rare fun."

"You may see the whole, and your imagination ought to be good enough to tell you what is going on. I see what his highness means by appointing such a place. He don't mean to risk any foul play."

"But it works both ways. I shouldn't care to meet one of these high-down fellows alone in a dreary place; he knowing that I hid a secret which put him in my power. They know how to silence meddlers, as well as baser villains, I can tell you, and the odds are in their favour. What court will sentence a gentleman for putting out of the world a man of the lower class?"

"You're right there," said Mr. Frost, rubbing his hands together. "There's nothing like being a gentleman born, or owning a patent of nobility, which is next to it. Such things are won, man, such things are won. Aye, that's a prize worth aiming for."

A greedy, feverish glow passed over the man's face. He stretched out his bony hand, opening the fingers as if he were clutching at something in the empty air.

The other looked at him sharply, then gave a short whistle.

"So that's the dodge, is it? I know very well who has set that a-going. My lady, the Countess Euphemia!"

"Hush! don't speak her name in this pobleian place. I don't know what you mean, and I don't think you do yourself."

The younger man continued whistling, evidently enjoying his companion's confusion, and vexation, at having betrayed more of his secret hopes than he intended.

The latter interrupted him, shortly.

"What are you fooling about? Your business and mine belong to one team, but you understand that I don't allow meddling into my private affairs."

"Well, well, there's no need of being so crusty. What time are you going down to meet this man?"

"In an hour or so. I'll call you, if you want to be near the place."

And in little more than an hour afterwards, the two strangers were sauntering along what was called the promenade, a broad street running parallel with the river, with a side-walk on one side, and a handsome carriage road on the other. It was a habit in the town for pedestrians and riders to congregate here, in that mellow, golden hour which precedes sunset.

No one thought it strange therefore, when Morley Ashton appeared on the scene, mounted on the mate to the hapless Selim. He rode once or twice across the promenade by the side of the Donithorne's carriage, in which, for a wonder, pretty Ada was estab-

lished by Lady Harriet, for of late the girl had become as fond of the saddle as Sir Anson could reasonably wish.

Presently, however, he dismounted, left his horse with a bystander—there were enough ready to spring with alacrity to secure the honour—and proceeded slowly and saunteringly upon the bridge.

Only one person was there. The stranger at the inn, who was leaning over the rail, gazing down idly at the rippling wavelets.

When he reached the same spot Mr. Ashton paused, lifted his hat courteously, and pointed with one hand towards the spire of Greywater church, as if in answer to some question of the stranger. Several of the promenaders noted this little incident, and if they gave it any thought at all, it was only to think how kindly and courteous Morley Ashton was always known to be, even to disagreeable people. Mr. A. Frost, however, was treated to something a little beyond Morley Ashton's usual demeanour.

The handsome features were more than ever like a statue's, cold, stern, proud, while a fiery gleam lingering in the eyes gave a hint of what lightning glances might come, if provoked to wrath.

"You are the person, I presume, who wrote to me a very singular letter," said he, coldly.

Mr. A. Frost, protected by his blue spectacles, looked back without blinking. He nodded carelessly.

There was a momentary tremble of the upper lip, then it was set more firmly, as Mr. Ashton said:

"I always give a fair hearing to all appeals, and I resolved not to vary my rule for this first threat. You will be good enough to explain yourself as briefly as possible, and we begin with—I may tell you, I have not the faintest idea of your meaning or object."

Mr. Frost leaned on the blue iron railing, a comfortable position, and coughed dryly, before he replied, still in that easy, careless tone which reaped as on the listener's nerves.

"You don't say so? Now, I thought you would understand at once that I was hard-up, and wanted some money."

"Sir," in Morley Ashton's quiet tone.

"Some money, you know," repeated the importunate Mr. Frost.

"Am I a bank, or a benevolent institution?" came out impatiently. "I think you had better apply at an insane asylum."

Mr. Frost took time to laugh, low and soft, with a disagreeable chuckle at the end.

"A very merry gentleman—so funny!" he repeated, carelessly, "but this is rather a grave subject."

He meant to anger his companion; no one knew better than this same individual, who, at present, called himself A. Frost, that directly you put to rout a man's coolness and self-possession, you have him at your mercy, and may count upon many unguarded points for attack.

But Morley, whose heart was seething like a maelstrom, still kept an iron hold upon his self-possession.

He only said, under his breath:

"It may be graver than you think, if you trifle with me."

"It's just here, Mr. Ashton. It's none of my doing, this wrong that has been done, that you know has been done, and Ruth Weston knows has been done, and I know has been done. So you see I'm willing to let it rest, because it don't help nor hinder me. But when a man needs money, and knows somebody has plenty, it's natural he should ask a price for keeping a secret that keeps the other man to his plenty."

He said this slowly, with deliberate emphasis, and the keen eye saw the slight colour in Morley Ashton's face fade into a ghastly pallor, and he seized upon it for a sign.

"Will you speak plainly? I tell you, man, I do not understand your meaning, except the unblushing declaration that you want money, and you are willing to take any unprincipled way of getting it," said Morley, sharply.

"That's just how it is; and now I appeal to you, Mr. Morley Ashton, if I'm the first man who has wanted money, and has not hesitated to take an unprincipled way of getting it."

The proud man before him could not control the receding tide of life, which, retreating to his madly-beating heart, left his face and limbs deadly-cold, and marbly white; but not a feature quivered, and the voice, though husky, kept its firmness.

"I do not understand hints. I insist upon plain speech."

"Is this plain enough?" retorted Frost, bending down over the railing for a moment, then raising himself suddenly, and whispering a brief sentence sharply.

Morley Ashton caught but half of it. That much, however, made him sick and faint. He turned round

slowly, opening his lips to the fresh air, and leaning heavily against the framework of the bridge.

Mr. Frost, though he was very curious, could not get the slightest glimpse of his face. He waited in silence, as patiently as he might.

Ten minutes, certainly, passed before another word had been spoken. Then, Morley Ashton, still with his back towards the other, said in a hoarse voice:

"I deny every word of your accusation. You have no proofs whatever, and you never will have. Still, because I so hate and loathe the evil gossip about my name, such gossip as an unscrupulous villain like you can scatter far and wide, I am willing to pay you something to keep you out of such foul business. What is your price?"

Frost laughed again. Such a laugh that the gentleman standing there before him, in sight of all the promenaders below, felt every drop of blood tingling, every muscle springing to answer the longing to send him flying over the bridge into the gurgling water below. But Morley ground his teeth together, and stood bolt upright, waiting for the answer.

"Five hundred pounds is little enough for such a secret, call it by what name you may," returned Frost. "It is as exorbitant as you are shameless and impudent," he said, "nevertheless, I shall consider it well spent, if it will induce you to quit this vagabond sort of life, which you evidently lead, and keep silence."

"Ahem! I see, there is then a little something beyond the philanthropy—I am, beside, to keep silence," sneered Frost.

Oh, how Morley Ashton loathed and hated himself that he stood there parleying with this man. A sudden impulse made him wheel round and say, defiantly:

"I believe I am doing wrong to pay such a swindler anything at all. I can stand whatever vile accusation you may bring forward. Better be mortified by an unavailing breath of scandal than be ashamed of having treated with such a wretch. Go, sir, and do your worst."

If only Frost had gone then, Morley Ashton would have held to this mood. But he was alarmed for the success of his mercenary hopes, and made a bold move.

"Very well," said he, coldly, "I will make a beginning then, at the political meeting to-morrow. And after that, I will walk over to see Sir Anson Donnithorne."

Morley Ashton shivered! As if by a lightning flash, there darted through his mind a vision of the amazement, the consternation, the wide sensation such an accusation as this man might bring would cause amongst all his highborn, wise, and distinguished friends. He had taken countless pains to build up an enviable reputation, to establish an invincible character. But people are fickle, and easily impressed with startling disclosures. He knew it better than most people, because he had taken such pains to watch the drift of public sentiment, and had been so morbidly sensitive upon the matter.

He caught his breath, as if already he were plunging from the stately height he now occupied, down the dizzy depths, and almost unconsciously stretched out his hand.

"But as I said before," continued Mr. Frost, "it's none of my business to make the exposure. I'd as soon keep silence; only I want this money."

"You shall have it," said Morley Ashton, in a low dreary voice.

"All right," returned the other, briskly; "supposing you bring it here to this same place, any time to-morrow you may choose to name."

"And you give me your solemn promise to keep silence?"

"Of course, I do."

"Then I will come to-morrow. Stay—I shall go down to the factory at ten. There is a shady road which leads to the rear yard. You could make a dozen excuses for being there, and you need scarcely detain me a moment. I will give it to you there."

"All right. Good day, sir."

Mr. Frost moved on, getting along swiftly, notwithstanding his limping.

Morley Ashton stood still, leaning heavily on the bridge, and looking at the water with wide, despairing eyes.

He had no sophistry for himself, this man whose life had, for Chardon Valley, such a noble, fair, worthy, and spotless record. He hurried at himself the most bitter and contemptuous accusations. He loathed, despised, maligning the cowardly, hypocritical spirit which hid behind the whitened wall.

He cried out fiercely, in the bitterest anguish:

"Oh, whitened sepulchre! Oh, terrible, terrible flaw in the Diamond!"

When at length he roused himself to go back to the man waiting by his horse, he walked slowly, and used every possible exertion to recover the appearance of composure and cheerfulness.

At the turn of the bridge, where a clump of bushes made a shaded retreat, his careless hand fairly touched the fringe of a gray shawl, and knew it not. If only he had seen, and turned, he would have discovered a woman standing there in the shadow, her head just reaching to the topmost spray of the bushes. A woman with a singular face: with grave, watchful eyes, and a mouth which strangely blended strength and gentleness; the woman, in short, for whom so many were searching—Ruth Weston, the former housekeeper at Holly Bank.

Morley Ashton, however, did not see, and went his way.

The woman went on, dropped such a veil over her face as Abiatha Broad had found for Mabel at his friend Deborah's, and crossing the bridge, vanished from sight.

CHAPTER XX.

MARK DALY had said good-bye to his boyishness for ever. No one knows just at what age the line is crossed, or rather it is not age, but experience, which determines the matter.

Mark's rose-coloured dreams that, for all their vagueness and intangibility, were such blissful realities to him, had suddenly floated off, and left him standing alone in what seemed a chilly, dismal scene, no longer the glad-hearted, eager boy, but a brave, strong man. There seemed such a change of identity, that when he found himself alone he felt inclined to shake himself, to be sure that it was indeed he. That day upon which he and Ada Donnithorne had beheld advancing towards them, as from the grave itself, the noble figure of the man who was the benefactor of one, and the betrothed lover of the other, had laid its magical touch upon him, and made a man of him.

He tried to face the situation fairly, and grasp at a man's firmness and power, while yet his heart was aching with its yearning for the lost hopes that had fitted away, or shrivelled into blackness before his very eyes.

It proved the sterling integrity of Mark's character, the unselfish goodness of his heart, that while he suddenly recognised the strength of his own love for Miss Donnithorne, and became aware of Morley Ashton's claim upon her, he still cherished the same warm admiration and loyal faith in his patron.

He did not try to cheat himself with any sophistry, and say that the young lady's heart turned most warmly to himself, that he could make her happier—more nearly meet her girlish hopes and fancies. He only said, sternly, to his own wounded heart:

"Mr. Ashton loves her—has trusted his happiness to her care. He has reposed the most generous confidence and trust in you—you shall not betray him. You shall not give the most dastardly blow which could be given to any man. Cover over your aching wound, and hide it from all, and bear it patiently. You have asked for some grand and difficult achievement to try your warrior mettle. Accept this—never was there a nobler. What matter if the world's applause shall never praise the deed? Heaven will know, and will give you strength and peace."

And like a hero, Mark set himself to carry out this resolution.

He managed to evade his customary call at Donnithorne Hall. He manoeuvred cunningly, to have Lady Constance wheeled down into the library to be entertained by the lesson in painting, and to have her likeness taken, a la Chinoise.

He pretended to be searching earnestly for a card-board when Miss Donnithorne entered, but he did not lose her little start of surprise, the sudden flush of colour, the fading out of the eager sparkle in the blue eyes, and the listlessness of the step that crossed the room.

Poor Mark! he bore it heroically, though Ada, in every possible way, appealed for a return of his accustomed tender cordiality, and thus added tenfold to the difficulty of his inward struggle.

His heart sank when, by one of her playful stratagems, she secured his company to the avenue gate, to carry the portfolio she declared Lady Harriet was waiting to examine, for he dreaded any attempt at explanation.

Lady Constance, of course, excused him, though he pleaded his wish to entertain so unusual a visitor, and insisted that he should go with "her imperious little princess," and leave her to wait his return.

Just at the gateway, Ada turned and looked up into his face, a bright tear just slipping from the lovely blue of the iris into the golden fringe of the eyelash, the coral lips half-trembling, half-pouting like a child's, a new air of timid alarm and grief, that was even more enchanting than her gaiety.

"You are angry with me, Mark," said she. "I think it is very cruel of you, for I am sure I was unhappy enough before."

Poor Mark! What a temptation it was to grasp the little hand, half-fluttered towards him, to whisper a single hint of the wild longing in his heart, to clasp her in his arms, and kiss away the tear from the beautiful face.

The voice in which he spoke was a little husky, but he compelled it to be firm and cold.

"Oh, no, indeed, Miss Donnithorne, how can you think so! Even if I were so ill-natured as to take offence, do you think I should have the presumption to show it?"

"You cannot deceive me," retorted Ada, with a slight sob, which blended indignation and wounded feeling. "Did you ever speak in that tone to me before? What have I done, Mark?"

She stood with one white-gloved hand resting against the carved stone of the great gateway pillar; the wind was gently dallying with the golden-tinged tresses, and fluttering the long, white ostrich feathers of her hat across her eyes, but through them she saw the glistening tear, and the winning, touching sweetness of the fair young face. Never had Ada Donnithorne looked so lovely, so charming, and full of grace. Never had poor Mark's heart yearned so towards her.

"Miss Donnithorne," he stammered, and now his voice trembled, "believe me, I am not angry, and let me go, I beg of you."

"Tell me first what is the matter," said Ada, with a little resumption of her pretty, imperious way. "I shall not go until you do."

Mark looked up suddenly. The hand dropping listlessly at her side was not gloved. The sunshine glinted a star of lustrous brilliancy from one white taper finger. She had shown it to him before, why could she not understand now?

He reached out his hand, and touched the diamond lightly, while he said, gravely:

"Miss Donnithorne, I have been a giddy, thoughtless boy hitherto, enjoying all the dangerous sweetness of your society without a thought of wrong or harm. I am awake now. You remember you showed me Mr. Ashton's ring. It was wise and kind in you."

Ada's uplifted eyes dropped, the rich colour came mantling over her lovely face. Half unconsciously she raised the other hand, and began twisting nervously at the flashing circlet which held such deep significance.

"I wish, I wish," faltered she, and then continued pettishly, "I am sure I wish there was no such ring, that I had never taken it. He is no such great paragon in my eyes."

"Mr. Ashton is one of the wisest, noblest, and grandest gentlemen I ever knew!" exclaimed generous Mark; "any woman, though she were a princess, might feel proud of his allegiance."

Ada looked at him with a child's grieved wistfulness.

"I do not understand you at all," she said; "and I think it is cruel to spoil all my pleasure."

"Spoil all your pleasure! Oh, Miss Donnithorne, rather than do that, I would forego all my own happiness. Pray, think more with compassion than anger of my efforts to be honourable and faithful to Mr. Ashton."

"To Mr. Ashton," repeated Ada, with the thoughtlessness and impatience of the petted child she was; "I wish some one would have thought of somebody else. I think you had far better think of yourself. You told me the other day of your own hopes, your ambition—have you foregone the whole?"

Mark's ingenuous face flushed.

"Ah," said he, sorrowfully, "that was when I believed a fair path was opened to my efforts—when I thought it might be possible, by herculean efforts, to win the prize. I did not know there was a claim I could not put aside."

"I think you are fond of riddles. I don't in the least understand what prize you mean; but if I were you I would do my best. I would not allow any claim to thrust me aside."

Poor Mark! He choked back the impetuous words that longed to be spoken. He took a step through the gateway, and hailed the appearance of one of the Donnithorne servants, into whose hands he gave the portfolio, and said, respectfully:

"And now I will bid you good day, Miss Donnithorne, Lady Constance is waiting, I suppose, for my return to the library."

Ada flung a wistful glance behind her, but Mark did not turn his head. Lady Constance did not linger long after his return, but went back to her room, which held the new attraction of Mabel's presence, of whom, as yet, the rest of the household knew nothing.

Mark tried in vain to apply himself to business, but his head ached, his thoughts wandered, and, after a futile effort, he put away his papers, went down to the stables, and saddling Brown Boss himself, he mounted and rode away at no laggard pace.

(To be continued.)

INTERNATIONAL FLORAL EXHIBITION.—Arrangements have been made for holding an International Floral Exhibition, on a very extensive scale, in Ham-burgh, in September next. Garden architecture will be a very prominent feature in this exhibition, and great pains will be taken to procure the newest and best examples of rustic houses, bridges, railings, &c. A guarantee fund of 10,000*l.* has been subscribed.

SCIENCE.

THE TUSCAN LAKES, long laid under contribution for supplies of boric acid, are now supplying sulphate of ammonia in quantities that promise new wealth to agriculture, and to the Italians at the same time.

PICRATE GUNPOWDER.—Herr Lissigood, who has devoted many years to introduce picrate of potash or picrate of soda as an explosive agent, and has succeeded so far as to reduce the price of these salts to about one franc per pound, proposes a mixture of equal parts of picrate of potash and saltpetre as yielding the most powerful gunpowder. The same salt can, it is said, be employed with much advantage in the manufacture of fireworks.

OUR IRONCLADS.

ACCORDING to a parliamentary return issued, it appears that the number of iron-plated ships afloat is 34; there are also 10 buildings. Of four floating batteries, two are not yet completed for sea. Of the number of armour-clad ships afloat, 14 have iron hulls; the following are only partially armour-clad: viz., the Black Prince, with 26 guns, tonnage 6,109, horse-power 1,250; Warrior, 82 guns, tonnage 6,109, horse-power 1,250; Defence, 16 guns, tonnage 3,720, horse-power 600; Resistance, 16 guns, tonnage 3,710, horse-power 600; Achilles, 26 guns, tonnage 6,121, horse-power 1,250; Hec-tor, 18 guns, tonnage 4,089, horse-power 800; Valiant, 18 guns, tonnage 4,063, horse-power 800; Northumberland, 28 guns, tonnage 6,621, horse-power 1,350; Bellerophon, 15 guns, tonnage 4,270, horse-power 1,000; Hercules, 14 guns, tonnage 5,234, horse-power 1,200; Penelope, 11 guns, tonnage 3,096, horse-power 600; Waterwitch, 2 guns; Viper, 2 guns; Monarch, 7 guns.

Five of these afloat with iron hulls are wholly armour-clad; viz., the Minotaur, with 26 guns, tonnage 6,621, horse-power 1,350; Agincourt, 28 guns, tonnage 6,621, horse-power 1,350; Prince Albert, 4 guns; Scorpion, 4 guns; Wivern, 4 guns. The Vixen, with 2 guns, has her hull built of both wood and iron, and is only partially armour-clad.

Eight of the ships afloat have wooden hulls, but are wholly armour-clad—viz., the Royal Oak, with 24 guns, tonnage 4,056, horse-power 800; Prince Consort, 24 guns, tonnage 4,045, horse-power 1,000; Caledonia, 24 guns, tonnage 4,125, horse-power 1,000; Ocean, 24 guns, tonnage 4,047, horse-power 1,000; Lord Clyde, 24 guns, tonnage 4,067, horse-power 1,000; Lord Warden, 18 guns, tonnage 4,080, horse-power 1,000; Favorite, 10 guns, tonnage 2,094, horse-power 400; Royal Sovereign, 5 guns, tonnage 3,765, horse-power 800.

Six of these afloat have wooden hulls, and are only partially armour-clad—viz., the Royal Alfred, with 18 guns, tonnage 4,068, horse-power 800; Zealous, 20 guns, tonnage 3,716, horse-power 800; Repulse, 12 guns, tonnage 3,749, horse-power 800; Pallas, 8 guns, tonnage 3,372, horse-power 600; Research, 4 guns; Enterprise, 4 guns. This formidable fleet of ironclads afloat represents in the aggregate 520 guns. Out of the 34 vessels afloat, 13 are built on Mr. Reed's plan and five on Captain Cole's turret plan.

The first cost of some of the iron vessels now complete, including fittings, but exclusive of incidental and establishment charges, was as follows:—

Northumberland, 459,194*l.*; Minotaur, 452,827*l.*; Agincourt, 446,115*l.*; Achilles, 444,590*l.*; Warrior, 356,990*l.*; Black Prince, 357,993*l.*; Bellerophon, 348,076*l.*; Prince Albert, 201,618*l.* The cost of some of the wooden vessels was:—Lord Clyde, 273,824*l.*; Lord Warden, 316,837*l.*; Royal Alfred, 269,370*l.*; Ocean, 253,813*l.*; Caledonia, 264,658*l.*; Prince Consort, 226,995*l.*

Of the ten ships building, seven have iron hulls and are only partially armour-clad—viz., the Sultan, with 13 guns, tonnage 5,226, horse-power, 1,200; the Captain, 6 guns, tonnage 4,272, horse-power 900; the Iron Duke, 14 guns, tonnage 3,774, horse-power 800; the Audacious, 14 guns, tonnage 3,774, horse-power 800; the Invincible, 14 guns, tonnage, 3,774, horse-power 800; the Hotspur, 2 guns, tonnage 2,697 horse-power 600. The Glatton, with 2 guns, has an iron hull, and is wholly armour-clad. The Swiftsure and the Triumph have their hulls of iron sheathed with wood. They are to carry 14 guns each, with a tonnage for each vessel of 3,893; horse-power, 800 each. These ten ships represent in the aggregate 107 guns. Two are to be built on Cap-

tain Cole's plan, and eight on Mr. Reed's plan. The estimated first cost of the Captain is 335,000*l.*, that of the Audacious 222,657*l.*, that of the Invincible 221,757*l.*, and that of the Vanguard 249,759*l.* The names of the four floating batteries—three of which have iron hulls and are wholly armour-clad—are the Erebus, with 16 guns; the Terror, with 16 guns; and the Thunderbolt, with 16 guns; the Thunder, with 14 guns, has a wooden hull, but is wholly armour-clad. The first cost of these batteries is thus stated: Erebus, 82,039*l.*; Terror, 80,726*l.*; Thunderbolt, 80,280*l.*; Thunder, 59,776*l.* The above 48 ships and batteries represent in the aggregate 689 guns, and horse-power of 35,290.

TEMPERATURE OF THE SEA BETWEEN ENGLAND AND AMERICA.

I SEND you the temperatures of the sea taken during my voyage from Havre to New York in the steamship *Atalanta*, 1868—Dixon commander. But for his constant attention I believe the ship would never have reached port. In my experience I never witnessed any gale so intensely severe as that of the 2nd December, nor one in which skill and experience in a commanding officer were so apparent and necessary.

Nov. 17. Left Havre.

" 18. ON Lizard Point.

" 19. Off Cape Clear.

	Lat.	Long.	Water	Air	Wind
" 20.	49 40	10 53	58	53	SW
" 21.	50 13	15 15	58	54	Variable and W
" 22.	50 23	17 39	55	59	NW
" 23.	49 39	22 24	54	50	Westly and var.
" 24.	49 52	26 37	53	49	Variable
" 25.	49 17	29 16	58	54	Calm
" 26.	48 32	32 49	57	53	NW
" 27.	47 32	38 56	60	56	E
" 28.	46 43	44 30	56	50	Variable
" 29.	46 21	47 46	54	35	SW to NW
" 30.	45 26	41 23	38	32	SW to NW
Dec. 1.	45 7	52 33	42	36	W to NW
" 2.	44 41	55 26	43	33	SW to W
" 3.	43 49	56 52	48	39	N
" 4.	42 3	61 5	46	36	N
" 5.	40 51	66 55	51	51	N
" 6.	40 38	69 59	51	46	NE
" 7.	Off Nantucket.	Heavy weather, with snow. Pilot taken at 8 p.m.			
" 8.	New York.	Land all covered with snow; raining heavily.			

REMARKS.

Nov. 20.—Strong breeze; saw numbers of *Delphinus Tursio*.

Nov. 21.—Violent gale.

Nov. 22.—Strong breezes; a few specimens of *Delphinus Tursio* seen.

Nov. 24.—Much lightning, and strong breezes in evening.

Nov. 25.—Heavy ground swell; large fish seen in distance; very like tunny, which is abundant in the St. Lawrence estuary.

Nov. 26.—Close-reefed topsails.

Nov. 27.—Fine weather; shark passed under stern; a new variety of gull seen.

Nov. 28.—Heavy gale; lost jib; shipped forward several heavy seas; gulls still plentiful.

Nov. 29.—Very severe gale, of tornado description.

Nov. 30.—Strong breezes, but glass falling; a few "black fish" seen on port bow.

Dec. 1.—Strong wind, freshening with sunset, and growing colder.

Dec. 2.—Tremendous gale; sails blown away; heavy seas shipped; ship labouring; fore gaff broken.

Dec. 3.—Moderate; all busy repairing yesterday's damage; glass very high.

Dec. 4.—Strong wind, and snow occasionally.

Dec. 5.—Gale.

Dec. 6.—Severe gale.

New York.

THE SUEZ CANAL.

DURING the month ending 15th November, the excavations for the Suez Canal amounted to 2,102,000 cubic metres. This is the fourth month in which the excavation has exceeded two millions of cubic metres. Six steam dredging machines on the canal, between Port Said and Bass El-Ech, excavated 218,628 cubic metres, or, on the average, 52,271 cubic metres each. The quantity, however, excavated by one of these dredgers amounted to 89,899 cubic metres, or near 3,000 cubic metres per day. The position of these works up to the 15th November was as follows:—

	Cubic metres.
Amount excavated up to the 15th October, 1868 ...	51,347,718
Ditto from 15th October to 15th November ...	2,102,000
Total amount excavated up to 15th November ...	53,449,718
Remaining to be excavated ...	20,662,412
Total excavation in line of canal ...	74,112,130

PROPOSED IRON BRIDGE BETWEEN ENGLAND AND FRANCE.—A tunnel under the Channel, between

Dover and Calais, has long been talked of by engineers as well as other people; and experiments that have been made on each shore, as well as in the bed of the sea, show that the scheme is at least feasible; but there seems now more probability of a bridge being thrown across this troublesome passage. M. Boutet, the engineer of the project, has secured the approval, not only of the Emperor of the French, but of some twenty-five brother engineers, which is a great fact in itself. The plan at present proposed includes thirty spans (arches, as they are commonly called), with piers composed of iron cylinders, so braced together as to offer very little resistance to the wind or sea. M. Boutet calculates that the structure will be able to resist thirty-six times the force of the heaviest gales—a very difficult thing for non-professional people to understand. If this plan is feasible, it is to be hoped that British and French capitalists will come forward in aid of it. It would be a grand triumph of science could such a railway bridge be thrown across the Channel. What would be the effect it is not easy to imagine.

A NOVEL PROJECTILE WEAPON.—A Russian officer has recently invented a new arm, which will fire 200 times a minute, and will easily cover with a shower of balls a space of thirty yards square. All friends of peace must hope that this statement is correct. When war becomes a practical impossibility we may see the standing armies disbanded. In the meantime it may be surmised that this is meant to give a nervous twinge to those who defy Russia at the Conference.

It seems that the rainfall of last year was, in spite of the dry summer, six and a half inches above the average—at least at Frant, in Sussex, whence Mr. R. H. Allnatt sends his estimate to the *Times*. It was 34.68 inches, the average rainfall being about 28, or nearly 25 per cent. above the average. The rainfall of December was nearly double that of the highest other month, namely, January. Indeed, much more than a third of the whole year's rain fell in the first and last months of the year. The month of least rain was June, in which little more than half an inch fell, and the next lowest, February, the latter part of which was lovely last year—the rainfall being less than an inch.

ANILINE COLOURS.—"Whilst the manufacture of Aniline colours thus became European, their consumption spread still farther; and now could be observed this unique fact in the history of commerce,—the West supplied the East with colouring matters, sending its artificial dyes to the confines of the globe, to China, to Japan, to America, and the Indies,—to those favoured climes which up to the present time had supplied the manufactures of Europe with tinctorial products. This was a veritable revolution. Chemistry, victorious, dispossessed the sun of a monopoly which it had hitherto always enjoyed. At the beginning of this century, when mythological language was in vogue, it would have been said that Minerva had triumphed over Apollo. But it was not sufficient to extract colours from tar and send them to China. . . . In order to apply these colours, the processes being altogether different from those followed by the Chinese, and their employment requiring the assistance of substances which were unknown to them, it was necessary. . . . to undertake the education of the Chinese dyers. This difficulty did not for a moment stop the European manufacturer; he sent to China and Japan not only the workmen who should teach his customers the way to apply the colours with which he supplied them, but also the chemical products necessary for their manipulation, such as sulphuric acid and absolute alcohol, which were before unknown to them. Thus arose considerable dealings with the East, the quantities sold by European manufacturers in 1864, 1865, and 1866 amounting to several millions of francs."

AN OLD ACT OF PARLIAMENT.—At the Petty Sessions recently held at Duncormack, near Wexford, a case was brought forward which created much interest among the farming classes. A farmer named White was charged by another named Sinnott with employing a man already employed by the complainant. The prosecution was brought under 43 Geo. III. c. 86, s. 7, which provides that if any master workman shall knowingly employ any artificer, labourer, &c., already employed by another, during the time such artificer, &c., shall be so employed, without leave of the person by whom such artificer or labourer shall be so employed, any such offender, being lawfully convicted before two justices, shall forfeit a sum of not less than 5*l.*, or not more than 20*l.* The man who was employed is undergoing a month's imprisonment for leaving his master's service. The sentence of the court was that the defendant should pay a fine of 5*l.*, and costs, or, in default of payment, to be imprisoned for a term proportionate to the fine.



[A STRANGE STORY.]

THE PHANTOM OF MARION.

CHAPTER I.

And ever and aye the night wind shrieks,
Twixt the manse and the tower you see:
"When I'm 'neath the sod, do not visit him, God,
With the wrong he has done to me!"

UPON a gentle eminence, shaded by immense trees and skirted by beautiful rivers and fertile valleys, rose up towards the skies a grand castle, whose towers, like gigantic pyramids, stood boldly out against the horizon and overlooked the tops of the noble trees that clustered around, and nearly obscured from view its lower portions.

In the days of feudal warfare the castle had often been the object of determined siege and wild attack; when in fierce conflict the noble lords of Beauford led their trusty followers into the thickest of the fray, where the battle-axe gleamed in the sun, and the fatal lance, wielded by the strong arms of the undaunted heroes of the royal line, swept all enemies from their path and carried terror and dismay to the breasts of those who rashly sought to cope successfully with the far-famed Edmund, Knight of Marion.

Since those days of confusion, turmoil, and indiscriminate bloodshed, the premises had greatly changed. War with its manifold dangers had passed, and time, with its ever-changing and improving influence, had materially altered the appearance of the castle and grounds. The battlements, where the sentry's regular steps were once heard during his midnight vigil, had become wide terraces and airy promenades, where nature twined her floral offerings and where lovers might delight to walk. Two of the towers, which loomed up like colossal statues upon the front of this mammoth structure, had been removed, leaving only those upon the rear to be preserved in their pristine state, as a memento of past days, as a *souvenir* of antiquarian architecture.

Where once hung the heavy iron door was now a portico of white marble of modern style, supported on each side by pillars, around which clung, in rustic simplicity and loveliness, blushing flowers, which emitted their grateful perfume upon the balmy air in lavish exuberance. At the left of the portico, and separating the park from the lawn, was a wall of solid stone, curiously carved, in the middle of which was a gate, hung upon mammoth posts, ornamented with quaint devices, and in perfect accordance with the appearance of the exterior of the castle.

Where once were "moat, drawbridge, and port-

cullis weight" was now a finely-gravelled avenue, bordered by neatly-trimmed box hedges, and large oaks and sycamores, whose tops, towering towards the azure dome above, met and formed an arch, more glorious in its natural beauty and perfection than any ever conceived by the brain of man. Between the interstices of the boughs the golden rays of the sun stole in, and, mingling with the spots of blue sky just perceptible and the verdant leaves, formed a beautiful tricoloured crescent of irradiating, scintillating light which might have ornamented the realms of paradise.

At the left and right of the portico and nestling close to the wall were plots of exquisite flowers, which opened their silken petals, that the brilliant beams of the god of day might shine upon them, give them new life, and enhance their beauty; while the odoriferous perfume that emanated from their variegated folds rose pure upon the air and saluted the senses of the lovely songsters, who flitted from tree to tree and warbled dulcet strains of heavenly music, as if in reply to the mute offerings which exhaled from the hearts of the blooming exotics.

Upon that mild, bright July morning, in the drawing-room of the castle—which was elegantly and tastefully decorated with the finest and costliest of furniture, with the exception of a stupendous antiquarian armchair of carved walnut, which the present owner of the estate preserved as an heirloom—sat Lord Beauford, his wife, and daughter.

Arthur Montrose Beauford, Earl of Marion, was a man of imposing appearance, possessing a form of sufficient rotundity to preserve symmetry, while his broad shoulders and deep chest showed the physical strength which had distinguished the house of Beauford for centuries back and was now centred in him, the last male representative of the race. Around his brow the winter of life was hovering, perceptible by the iron gray hair, which was combed back straight from his forehead, while the face beneath wore a certain degree of *hauteur*, in concord with his erect carriage and peculiar to the scions of his noble house. His features expressed sternness, resolution, and irritability, tempered by a certain mildness which ameliorated their severity.

Opposite to him, and sitting in an erect position, appeared Lady Beauford, a woman somewhat younger than her husband, and by many called beautiful. Her forehead was high, with eyebrows rather large, but finely shaped, arching o'er eyes brilliant in their purple blackness, but restless and uneasy—an eye pleasing to behold, yet possessing in its hidden depths the charm of a serpent. Her features were regular, with the exception of the nose, which was rather thin and sharp, betraying to the keen phy-

siognomist the quality of subtlety; her lips were also narrow and of a pale carmine hue, which closed over teeth, white, sharp, and glistening.

There was something about Lady Beauford which would puzzle the keenest observer of human nature. One opinion arrived at in regard to her character or disposition, would be instantly changed by a movement of those shining and seemingly dangerous orbs, or partially annulled, and a new conjecture given birth to, by the closing or unclosing of the thin, firm lips.

Directing those luminous orbs upon her husband, while the lips slowly parted and revealed the tips of her pearly teeth, she said:

"My lord, you seem to trouble yourself to an unreasonable extent with regard to an affair which is of the past. The child was lost, searched for, and not found. Why do you not rest easy?"

Lord Beauford's lip curled sarcastically. It was evident by the manner in which he regarded her that there was little affection between them. Returning her glance, he replied:

"My lady, according to your ideas, I have always been unreasonable. Again, I never spoke of that child without receiving a petulant answer from you. Why that subject should ruffle your temper is more than I can imagine."

She paused a moment, bit her lips, and then rejoined:

"It is nothing uncommon to be assured of petulance by you. The reason I dislike the subject is, because I am weary of a constant recurrence to it. Originality and variety are very refreshing."

"So is your sarcasm, my lady, it is so very rarely that you favour me with it."

A baleful gleam shot from the dark eye, and she answered:

"You are disposed to quarrel, I perceive. As that has now become an indispensable recreation, I pray that you proceed and finish it as soon as possible."

The hard tones of her voice and the cutting manner that accompanied her words, irritated him, and he was about to reply angrily, but, upon second thought, checked himself and said:

"You are well aware, my lady, that an altercation cannot be conducted without two persons; however, cast that aside. I desire to ask you a question."

"Proceed!" she briefly and indifferently replied.

"I desire to know why you nourish such an antipathy to Colonel Le Fontaine?" he continued.

The interrogatory seemed to call up unpleasant thoughts, and raising her eyes, which now burned with the light of anger, she fretfully responded:

"Lord Beauford, I believe it is a pleasure to you

to introduce subjects which displease me; I believe you study how to annoy me."

"You know your accusations are unjust—"

"Certainly they are," she interrupted, in tones of irony, and arising as she spoke, "I am always wrong. I will listen to no more of your—"

"Be seated, madam!" he ejaculated, his forbearance giving way. "I desire no melo-dramatic displays."

She turned, directed her flashing orbs upon him for an instant, and then, seating herself mechanically, awaited his words.

"Now if you will be so kind as to control your temper," he calmly observed, "I think that we can converse without excitement. Will you tell me why you dislike the colonel?"

"Why do you wish to know?" she unconcernedly queried.

The question was a provoking one to a man of Lord Beauford's temperament; but he allowed it, for the sake of quiet, to pass unnoticed, and composedly answered:

"I see by the paper that he has arrived in London. It is very likely that he will visit us, and I only desire that he may be sure of a courteous welcome."

"So, my lord," she returned, raising her eyebrows, "your words convey the insinuation that I am not capable of doing the honours of Beauford Castle? I thank you, my noble lord."

Her words were aggravating in the extreme, and it required a strong exercise of his will-power to restrain himself. He waited a moment, that his indignation might subside, and then responded:

"Why will you misconstrue everything? You know my words carried no such signification."

"Oh, your speeches never have any meaning, except that which you are pleased to attribute to them after they are uttered," she scornfully rejoined.

A gleam of anger lit up her husband's eye, and he replied:

"Lady Beauford, I have tried to avoid any unpleasant words. You will favour me by not offering any more provocations."

"Of course I provoke you," she exclaimed. "You are not only hard and cruel; but you are callous and obdurate! I wish—"

"Silence, madam!" he commanded, his anger bursting its bounds. "And remember that you are addressing your lord."

As he uttered the above words, a slight rustling sound might have been heard in the back drawing-room, and Lady Alice Beauford, who had been a silent and unwilling listener to the above interchange of affectionate remarks, glided unperceived from the room and passed on through the hall until she reached the portico, where, leaning against a pillar, she silently contemplated the beauty and richness of the earth. A lovely woman was Lady Alice Beauford, and, incomprehensible as it may seem, possessed none of her father's sternness or her mother's peevishness; but, unlike either of her parents, she was calm, meek, and lovable, yet endowed with requisite spirit, determination and firmness. In figure she was tall, a little above the medium height, and blessed with a form of perfect symmetry, undulating and finely developed, while her features, though not regular, were clearly cut and bore a certain fascination that was irresistible.

A few moments before she had returned from her morning ride, and, without doffing her habit, had entered the drawing-room to speak to her father. Unfortunately she passed in at the very moment the conversation opened, and as her parents at that time were within a few feet of her, she was obliged to remain quiet, as she could not move without making her proximity apparent. Thus she was an unwilling listener, and it was not until, in the heat of their discussion having moved farther away, that she was allowed to free herself from her disagreeable position, and pass unnoticed from the room.

As the beautiful flowers gently inclined under the mild breath of the morning zephyrs, Lady Alice sighed, and, resting her hand, which still enclosed her riding-whip, upon the column at her side, she sweetly murmured:

"Those lovely buds are in harmony, the tranquillity of nature is about me. See those golden orange blossoms! They tell of woman's worth in the dumb yet powerful language that appeals to the soul of the lover of the beautiful." She sighed. "Ah me, I fear that poor papa would not appreciate my poetical ideas; he often frowns at what he terms 'my childish sentiment'; yet I cannot change my nature. True, those rare exotics are the only incentive to thoughts of this kind; assuredly my home does not engender them."

A painful expression swept across her face, and she resumed:

"I really know not what to think of mamma; of late her quarrels with papa have been more frequent. Ah me, why should we live in dissension? Sometimes I look upon human beings as below animals in some respects, for they do not wilfully disagree and

indulge in altercation. Nature, bright blooming nature, is at peace, the birds of the air are ever merrily singing, the earth shows a Creator's love; and why should we, so much superior to everything that heaven has made, indulge in spite and resentment?" Again a pause in her soliloquy, and ere a moment passed she continued:

"I know not. I ask myself questions that I cannot answer; perhaps they are foolish—I am not sure that they are not. Oh, how I wish I had a brother—a friend—who would point out my failings, that I might correct them! Papa is so stern and cold, and mamma—well, in truth it seems as if I had no mother, as far as love is concerned."

A long respiration, from a heart suffering for tenderness, consideration, and love, escaped her lips, and she once more gazed upon the flowers, as if their bright and varied leaves were the only companions to cheer her heart.

A few more moments passed, and through the long hall echoed the sound of her mother's voice in angry tones, followed by hasty footfalls and the noisy closing of a door; and Lady Alice knew that the interview between her parents had terminated, as such discussions usually did, by the wife retiring in anger and her husband sitting moodily alone.

For some moments Lady Alice moved not, but continued to gaze meditatively upon the beautiful flowers that were spread before her in lavish magnificence. Presently the sound of approaching hoofs fell upon her ear, and, raising her eyes, she glanced inquiringly around; but, perceiving no one in sight, she dropped her gaze and murmured:

"I really wish I knew the cause of mamma's violent dislike to Colonel Le Fontaine. I think he—"

At that moment a coal-black steed emerged from the trees, bearing proudly upon his back a noble-looking gentleman, who, as he beheld the vision of beauty before him, drew tight his reins, and, lifting his hat with a most ineffable grace, said, in a deep, melodious voice:

"Noble lady, I give you greeting!"

For a moment astonishment held Lady Alice speechless. An instant before his image had risen before her mental vision, his name had trembled upon her lips, and now he sat smiling before her. A thrill of pleasure sent the blood to her cheek, which quickly receded and gave place to a look of pain as she thought of the estimation in which her visitor was held by her mother.

For an instant she stood with downcast eye, her right hand resting upon the marble column, and meditatively moving the golden-mounted riding-whip, which she still held between her delicate fingers; then remembering her guest, she raised her azure orbs, and, smiling sweetly, answered:

"Welcome, Colonel Le Fontaine—thrice welcome to Beauford Castle!"

He glided gracefully from the saddle, and, approaching, bent low over her hand, murmuring:

"Thanks, fair lady, your smile reassures me."

Lady Alice bowed, and, accepting his proffered arm, ascended the steps. As they were about to enter, Lord Beauford appeared. As he saw his visitor, his face relaxed its stern expression, and extending his hand he cordially said:

"Ah, colonel, this is indeed a pleasure."

The young officer smiled, and replied:

"I am highly honoured by the kindness which yourself and daughter have showered upon me."

"Let me share the honour," rejoined Lord Beauford, "in having a hero of Algiers in my castle. Let us enter."

"It is hardly etiquette, my lord, to enter your princely domain in my travel-stained garments, but my valet was detained by his horse casting a shoe. He will be here presently." He paused. "Hark! I hear the echo of approaching feet—yes, he is here now!"

As the colonel spoke, a horse and rider cantered up the avenue and stopped before the door of the castle. The valet quickly dismounted, and, having received orders from his master, he remounted, and proceeded towards the stables, while the party entered the mansion.

After a few moments of conversation, Colonel Le Fontaine adjourned to the apartments which had been assigned him.

In a short time he descended. As he entered the drawing-room, he beheld Lady Beauford, and, advancing, greeted her with the most refined politeness.

She acknowledged his salutation by a very gracious smile, and inclination of the head, although her lips underwent the slightest perceptible curl, and the purple-black eyes roamed searchingly over his person and dwelt upon his face with particular earnestness.

"Mamma's good humour has returned very quickly," thought Lady Alice, as she noticed the greeting and wondered what had caused such a radical change. While thus meditating, she heard her mother's voice in silvery tones:

"Give me your arm, my love; dinner is upon the table."

A smile, with the least tinge of scorn, hovered around her husband's lips as he complied, and led the way to the dining-room, followed by Lady Alice, resting upon the arm of the gallant colonel.

During the time they remained at the table, Lady Beauford maintained an animated conversation, and exercised the greatest respect and urbanity towards her guest, who seemed to appreciate the condescension, and sought to return it in equal measures. At times their eyes met and rested upon each other with glances, which told that beneath the smiling exterior a certain something lay concealed which both tried to fathom. Short and quick those glances were, like the meeting of two swords, yet carrying in their evanescent flashes, meaning, deep and significant.

The possession of a fine form, a face interesting from its mobility and geniality of expression, rather than handsome, and shaded by wavy masses of jet black hair, and endowed with a mild disposition tempered with resolution and courage, rendered Colonel Adolph Le Fontaine a favourite in society, and a man to be respected and feared in camp.

He was introduced to the *crème de la crème* of English society by the celebrated General Le Ferre, his superior officer, to whose friendship and influence he owed his prosperity.

In London, during the preceding winter, he had met Lady Alice at a soiree, and at once there sprung up between them a sudden friendship. He admired her gentle, artless ways and winning beauty, and she in turn liked him for his intellect, his dignified presence and manly qualities.

Feeling a great interest in the young man, and desiring to have more of his company, Lord Beauford invited him to the castle to the infinite pleasure of his daughter and great disgust of his wife, who, for some unknown cause, had conceived an aversion to the young officer, which, as she became more acquainted with him, increased rather than diminished.

Dinner being over, the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room and left the gentlemen to their wine.

"My daughter—"

Lady Alice raised her eyes inquiringly. It was so strange for her mother to address her kindly that she was quite surprised, and her surprise deepened to astonishment as she saw the smiles that wreathed her parent's features. Gratified at this favourable change, Lady Alice regarded her pleasantly and waited for her to proceed.

"My daughter," began Lady Beauford, in the same sweet voice, and sinking languidly into her chair as she spoke, "I—really, well, it is a delicate subject; but are you aware that I do not like Colonel Le Fontaine?"

"Yes," replied Lady Alice, very quietly.

Her mother had hoped that she would have asked why, so that she could have continued more smoothly; but as she did not, Lady Beauford was obliged to proceed without any cue or else remain silent. As the latter was not her forte, she twirled the diamond upon her finger, and continued:

"My dear child, I desire you to treat our guest with due consideration, but nothing more. He is very dazzling, I know; but he is not a suitable companion for a Beauford."

"Why not?" was the sententious inquiry, while the large blue eyes were turned directly upon the speaker.

"For obvious reasons, my dear. His lineage is unknown to us. He is only a colonel in the French army, and we are not sure of that, for we have never seen his commission."

The expression upon the daughter's face as she listened to the very practical words of her worldly mother might be construed into scorn or pity,—there seemed to be an intermingling of both. A moment passed in thought, and then she replied, in half-reproachful tones:

"How can you be so suspicious? Colonel Le Fontaine is a gentleman in every sense of the word, and assuredly papa would not invite him to our home unless he were a proper companion for me."

The dark eyes became restless, an expression of impatience crossed her features, and she hastily rejoined:

"Hurt me all you can, Alice; quote your father's words, and hold them up as law to me. You are ungrateful. While I warn you of a shameless adventurer, you endeavour to silence me by repeating his inconsiderate words."

"Mother, you wrong papa, you do the colonel great injustice, and pain me by misconstruing my words."

"So you are the champion of the noble earl of Marston and the brave colonel. Really you are quite eloquent. But, Alice,"—and her voice grew low and hoarse—"you shall not walk, sail, and drive with that insipid coxcomb, and have your brain turned by his nonsense—"

"Mother," and her blue eyes shone brightly, while determination sat upon her features. "Remember that you are addressing a woman. Allow me to judge of his conversation; I am fully able to do so."

Lady Beauford gazed upon the firm, self-possessed woman before her with anger and amazement. It was the first time that she had ever demurred to the almost insulting language that had often been addressed to her, and this fact seemed to exasperate Lady Beauford, who turned upon her with flashing eyes and exclaimed:

"Colonel Le Fontaine is a"—at that moment she heard a step in her rear, and with superior cunning modulated her voice to sweet tones, and changed her remark to—"perfect gentleman, my dear, and a daring soldier. I desire you to do everything in your power to make his visit a pleasant one."

Amazed at this termination of a sentence which at first promised to be full of virulence, Lady Alice made no reply, but reflected with feelings of shame upon the gross deceit which her parent had practised.

"Receive my thanks, dear lady," remarked the colonel, bowing politely, "for the encomiums you passed upon me, and which I accidentally overheard."

"Why, my dear colonel," murmured Lady Beauford, with the sweetest of smiles, and blushing very red, "I did not intend the remark for your ears. You officers are so vain. I was merely requesting Lady Alice, who generally keeps herself sequestered, to throw aside a little of her reserve for your sake."

"For which intercession in my behalf I am most grateful," answered the colonel, darting a quick, significant glance at Lady Alice, so significant, indeed, that she dropped her eyes, reddened, and toyed confusedly with her fan.

"And, Lady Alice, will you concede to your lady mother's request, and smile for my benefit?" queried the colonel, a moment after.

With eagerness Lady Alice seized the opportunity to wreak innocent revenge upon her mother for her dissembling, and darting a glance towards her, she arose and said, with a beaming smile:

"It shall be my study to carry out my mother's wish. Do you love flowers, colonel?"

"Very much," he rejoined. "Their beauties are my favourite study."

"I am so glad," she answered, with enthusiasm. "Your arm, colonel; we will talk upon the lawn." And laughing merrily she left the room.

As she arrived at the door, she turned round for an instant, and glancing at her mother, remarked:

"You were so disinterested, mamma. How kind you were. I know I shall enjoy myself very much, for the colonel is well versed in floriculture."

Lady Beauford's eyes gleamed angrily, her facial muscles twitched nervously, and stamping her foot with vexation, she apostrophised herself in no gentle terms for the inglorious failure which had attended what she at first thought to be the *chef d'œuvre* of conventional diplomacy.

Meantime, Lady Alice and her companion were traversing the lawn, and expatiating upon the mystery and loveliness of nature. To the young officer, fresh from the stern and practical duties of camp life, this change was most welcome. He appreciated the tender buds; but to him the loveliest flower among them all was—Lady Alice Beauford.

CHAPTER II.

LADY BEAUFORD had regained, or rather assumed, a calm, smiling exterior, and when the colonel and his companion re-entered, she greeted them with honied words, interrogated them with regard to the benefit and pleasure they had derived from their communion with nature, and laboured assiduously to make herself agreeable.

Lord Beauford smiled peculiarly as his wife grew more voluble, but paid little attention to the words that fell like raindrops from her lips.

During the evening, Lady Beauford, who was very fond of chess, challenged Colonel Le Fontaine to a game with her.

"I am very little skilled in it," he said, "but should be happy, under your tuition, to become more so."

And with this remark, he drew forward the table and seated himself opposite his noble partner.

Both father and daughter felt considerable interest in the contest, as Lady Beauford was an adept at the game and very rarely found her equal. Indeed, in her leisure hours she had applied herself to the study of it, and felt great pride in her skill.

With the knowledge of the above facts, and perhaps hoping that the colonel might win, that it might eradicate some conceit which Lady Beauford nourished, Alice narrowly watched every action, and felt a growing interest centre in the result.

Ere the contest had half closed, it was evident that the colonel was to be the victor. Lady Beau-

ford's smiles had vanished, her teeth were set firm, her features immovable, and she changed the figures from square to square with a motion that seemed as if her life was at stake.

The young officer regarded the game very indifferently, and appeared to move very carelessly, although it resulted each time to his benefit.

Lady Beauford was really growing very excited, although she strove with her whole power to conceal it, and was partially successful. The struggle must soon end, there was but one more "move" for her to make, and she hesitated some moments before entering upon the last square. Then, tremblingly, she placed her hand upon the figure and slowly guided it into its place.

Colonel Le Fontaine smiled, moved with his left hand, and looking with provoking calmness into her face, said significantly:

"Checkmated, my noble lady!"

She smiled, but 'twas a smile of suppressed anger and scorn, and the laugh that followed it, although intended to be careless and silvery, was harsh and mocking.

The young officer put forth his left hand to sweep the "men" from the board; in doing so, his coat caught the cuff beneath, and exposed his wrist, upon which was a black scar.

As Lady Beauford saw the mark, her face turned ashy pale, her eyes grew wild, her form trembled, and then, with a shriek of terror, she fell back in her chair in a death-like swoon.

Lord Beauford, who was accustomed to such scenes, and who imagined that her chagrin at defeat had caused her agitation, rose very mechanically and rang a bell, while Lady Alice gazed with apprehension at her mother, and the colonel, surprised at the abrupt ending of the affair, and with a faint suspicion that it was not wholly the fault of the game, sat looking on, astonished, doubting and perplexed.

In a moment a servant entered, and Lady Beauford was removed to her room, where proper restoratives were applied, and she soon returned to consciousness, though she declined descending again, and in a remarkably pleasant voice requested her husband to excuse her absence to their guest.

This of course he consented to do, and with something of his former warmth desired to know if he could in any way minister to her wants. She thanked him, wished to be left alone, and was confident of being fully restored upon the morrow. Bidding her good-night, he left her and re-entered the drawing-room.

After satisfying his guest with regard to his wife's condition, who—if the truth must be told, inquired more from courtesy than any other feeling—Lord Beauford proposed a walk upon the battlements, which being readily agreed to, the three proceeded to ascend.

'Twas a beautiful evening, clear and radiant with the light of the orb of night and the millions of glistening stars that studded the azure firmament and seemed to smile upon the verdant earth beneath.

"Truly, this is a romantic spot," remarked the colonel, "and made more so by this witching hour of night, which seems to carry us back to the times when these walls swarmed with armed men, and the din of war sounded through these avenues, where now vegetate lowly flowers."

"It does," murmured Lady Alice in reply; "but how much better 'tis now than it was then; the very word war sends a chill through my blood. I love peace and harmony."

"One could divine that by looking into your placid face," answered the colonel, gazing admiringly upon the beautiful being at his side.

Her eyes drooped under his ardent gaze, and for a few moments neither spoke.

"Where is papa?" queried Lady Alice, breaking the silence.

"My lord wishes you to excuse him for a short time," replied a white-haired retainer, who at that moment approached from the opposite battlements.

"Is mamma worse?" was the next question.

"I think not, my lady!" rejoined the aged servant, with a low courtesy.

"He is a fine-looking old man," observed the young officer as they walked away.

"Yes, and a good one, too," replied his companion; "he has been in our family all his life."

They had now arrived at the left tower upon the rear of the castle, and both took seats upon a rustic bench, where they could command an excellent view of the adjacent country.

"Can you tell me what castle that is at the left of the trees some distance away, and which seems so dark and shadowy?" asked the colonel, pointing to an extensive building, somewhat dilapidated, and which did indeed look dark and dismal, shaded as it was by monstrous trees, and a portion of it discernible only by the rays of silvery Luna striking diagonally upon it.

"I have often gazed wonderingly upon it," replied Lady Alice: "it seems as if there must be some romance connected with it, it looks so grand and still. Let us ask Ezra, he is familiar with the history of every place for miles around."

"Did you call me, my lady?" said the old man, advancing and bowing respectfully.

"I was upon the point of doing so," she rejoined. "I wish to know if you can give us any information of yonder castle?"

"There's queer stories abroad about that place, my lady," he returned, with an ominous shake of his head. "Though I don't know how true they are."

"We will not question the veracity of your tale, my good man," replied the colonel. "We merely wish to hear your legend if any there be, for amusement."

"Very well, my lord—"

"Simply colonel," interrupted the young officer, desiring no attention that he was not entitled to.

"I beg your pardon," answered the old man, "but to my story. It is nearly a quarter of a century since the castle was inhabited. Then it was occupied by Sir Edwin Rutherford, a fine, noble-looking man, of great strength and beauty; a thorough-going Englishman, who made no more of leaping a ditch fifteen feet wide than he would of drinking a glass of wine. He was good, too, and the people all around loved him and spoke his name with reverence, for although Sir Edwin was a great man, he did not spurn the lower classes, but looked out for their welfare, and never a winter passed but what he saw they were comfortable, and never a holiday went by but that he had a great gathering and gave them a dinner, and then he looked on, his kind features beaming with pleasure as the young folks danced upon the greensward. Ah, those were happy days, days when the peasants were cared for and well treated."

"A short time after, Sir Edwin was married, and he brought to the castle a rosy-cheeked, lovable woman, whose being there seemed to brighten up the old castle. The people were afraid that now Sir Edwin had a wife that they would be neglected, and that she would look down upon them. But they were never more mistaken, for she took a great liking to going among them and cheering them. Ah, this pleased Sir Edwin; you should have seen how he smiled upon her; why, he worshipped the very ground she walked on, and she was as happy as a bird, singing and smiling all the time."

"I have heard it said that real happiness is short-lived; I don't know whether it is always so, but I do know that it was not long before the castle was in deep mourning, and the people around were all sad, and there were many whisperings and sighs about the strange things that happened."

"But you have not told us the cause of the gloom which so suddenly fell on the castle," remarked Lady Alice.

"You must excuse me, my lady, for my roundabout way of talking, but it's the only way I can tell my story. What I am about to say I don't want my lord to know that I told, because he says I talk very little, and I'm proud of his saying so, and don't want him to think any other way. Let me see—oh, yes, I was telling about the sadness that came over the house. Oh! well it might be sad. Suddenly Sir Edwin fell ill, and died two days after being taken. 'Twas a terrible blow to the country, and everybody was looking sorrowful. But that was not the worst of it. The same night that he died, his wife gave birth to a child; by some mistake she learned that her dear lord had died, and she never breathed again after that. It was very sad, that dear wee little thing thrown into this great world at the same time both of its parents left it."

And apparently grieved by the reflection, the old man's head dropped upon his hands, and he seemed to be meditating deeply.

The dreadful coincidence, and the earnest manner in which it was related, had an effect both upon Lady Alice and her companion, and for some moments neither spoke. At length the colonel observed:

"And the child, good Ezra, what became of it?"

"It lived," continued the old man, "but only for a short time. After the death of Sir Edwin and his wife, their child was taken to a cousin of his, a noble lady; and it happened again very strangely, that she gave birth to a child at nearly the same hour that Sir Edwin died. The little child was received into her castle, and put under the charge of the nurse who took care of her child, and it was intended to bring them together, until the little orphan should be of age, and come into its property."

"But we don't know what a day will bring forth, and no more did they. The child had been in its new home but a short time, when one morning, the nurse woke up and found only one babe at her side; the little one had disappeared. The noble cousin was very ill, but gave orders to do everything to find it."

The nurse was very much frightened, and shortly left the castle, as if she were afraid that it might be laid to her. Well, the neighbourhood was roused, and every man, woman, and child joined in the search to find the lost child of the dear lord they had loved so much. Every lake and pond was dragged, every spot searched, large rewards offered, but no good came of it; the child has not been found to this day.

"Was not the lord's wife suspected of treachery?" queried the colonel.

"No, indeed. You see, sir, she was ill upon her bed at the time."

"Ah, yes," mused the colonel. "I had forgotten."

"This is true, is it not?" asked Lady Alice.

"Yes, every word of it," replied Ezra, "but the rest is what you may call moonshine."

"Indeed; then you have not revealed the most startling portion of this peculiar history."

"No; but I will now finish it. For years it has been common talk among the people, that in the month, and seventh day of July of every other year, a ghost appears upon the left turret of yonder castle. I do not believe in such things, but I have talked with a good many courageous, clever-headed men who tell that they have truly seen it; they say the figure, or whatever it may be, looks very much like Sir Edwin's wife, and that every time she comes, a light flames up near her left hand, and when the light dies away she disappears. I took the story for what it is worth, and you may do the same. I have nothing more to tell you, my lady."

"And a weird, strange story it is; it almost makes me shudder!" said Lady Alice, drawing her thin shawl closer over her shoulders.

"Was the spectre visible last year?" asked the colonel.

"Last year?" mused the old retainer. "Let me think: no, no, I am quite sure it was not; it is due this year."

"And to-night," continued the soldier, with interest in his tones, "is the seventh of July."

"Oh, colonel, so it is; let us enter the castle," said Lady Alice, nervously.

Her gentle motion as she drew nearer to him, and her hand tightening its grasp upon his arm, sent a thrill of joy through the being of the noble soldier.

"Ah," he thought, "could I but ever protect thee and shield thee from harm, could I but look into thy eyes and read there love for me—" he checked this train of reflection, 'twas madness; he, a French colonel, aspiring to the love of an earl's daughter; and, breathing a sad sigh, he suggested:

"Lady Alice, let us remain and test the truth of this rumour."

"I am not superstitious, but I am very nervous to-night; however, if you desire it, I will stay."

"Do not let me urge you against your inclination," he answered.

"No, I want to stay. I will stay!" she exclaimed.

"Colonel, will you tell me the time?" said the old man, respectfully.

"It is now five minutes to eleven," he rejoined, glancing at his watch.

"So late; it is nearly time for—" she said no more, but trembled slightly, and leaned heavier upon the arm of her companion.

Ezra arose, and with a share of the interest that pervaded the others, directed his eyes towards the distant turrets of the Haunted Castle, which, as the moon had neared the zenith and now shone brightly, stood out in bold relief.

(To be continued.)

FAIRLEIGH;

OR, THE BANKER'S SECRET.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER some trouble, and many suppressed expletives upon the part of Clarence, the three at last reached the room designated by the Irishwoman.

Their knock was answered by a pale young girl, the marks of care and privation perceptible upon her features, relieved in a measure, however, by the rich black hair that was puffed over her brow, twisted into a coil behind, and bound with a neat blue ribbon. Her dress was coarse and plain, yet neat. As she saw Florence, a slight flush of pleasure suffused her face, succeeded by a look of pain, as she thought of the poor place she had to invite them into. But they had come. She must do the best she could, and in a low, melancholy voice, she requested them to enter.

Almost everything in the room bore the impress of poverty, yet what there was, was arranged in the best possible order, and not a speck of dirt was to be seen on the floor. Chairs were a scarce commodity, there being only two in the room, besides the one she occupied herself. She offered this to Florence, who assured her that the one she had was very com-

fortable. Clarence was seated, while Mr. Rowe stood near his friend's chair. This fact brought a blush to Miss Prescott's cheek and she offered her chair to Mr. Rowe, who insisted that he had rather stand, and with the kindest of smiles he bade her resume her seat.

"I am very sorry," said Miss Prescott, "that I have no better place to ask you into."

"You must not speak of that," replied Florence, in a tone of gentle command, "if you do, I shall go away. We did not come to see your rooms, we came to see you. Now you must tell me your name."

"My name is Milly."

"And you, you don't think of yourself. You are good and unselfish."

"I wish I could be better," she replied, in a low voice. "I am very anxious with regard to mother; she is asleep now, in the next room, or I would introduce you."

"Do not awaken her. Sleep will benefit her. But you must not work so hard as you do now, if you do you will be ill, too."

"It cannot be helped; it's my lot. I must bear it as calmly as possible."

"Oh, you are so good!" said Florence, warmly.

"Now I must go. Please give me your exact number and street."

Milly gave her the desired information, and then, slipping a parcel into her hand, and raising her finger not to refuse, Florence bade her good-bye, the gentlemen bowed respectfully, and the three passed out.

They again entered the carriage, and much to Clarence's surprise, kept on in the same direction.

"Are you not going to return," he queried.

"Yes, when I get through with my visits," she replied.

Clarence subsided, leaned back upon the cushions, and endeavoured to look upon his position with calm resignation. In the meantime, Florence and Mr. Rowe maintained an animated conversation. It was the first time that he had exercised his powers of conversation to any extent, and as Florence listened to the gems of thought which fell from his lips, the conviction which his words carried with them, the sincere look which shone from his face, the purity of his opinions, and the modesty with which they were advanced, she felt an interest in him which was new to her.

Their conversation was again interrupted by the stoppage of the carriage. The coachman let down the steps, and a second time they alighted, and proceeded into a dirty street, much the same as the former one, and boasting of about the same number of ragged children, and other things indispensable to the locality. After picking their way among the dirt that lined the street, they stopped at a lodging house.

Their summons was answered this time by a thick-set Dutchwoman, who, after staring very impudently at her visitors for a moment, placed her arm akimbo, and screwing up her eye, enquired:

"Who might you want to know, eh?"

"I wish to see Mrs. Lothrop," answered Florence.

The woman turned round, and pointing with her fat finger to the soiled and shabby stairs, answered:

"You go straight up, and den ven you come mit de second pair of de stair, you turn and go mit an alley, and den you come to mit anoder pair of stairs, and den you go straight up—so!"

Clarence groaned in spirit.

Florence, with a partial understanding of the gibberish which the woman had uttered in a thick and hasty manner, started bravely forward.

In answer to their knock, a child came forward, of wan appearance and scantily clothed. She stepped back a pace, as she saw the finely dressed lady and gentlemen, and regarded them wistfully and with evident surprise; then seeming to recollect herself, she said:

"Do you want to see my mamma?"

"Yes, dear, if Mrs. Lothrop is your mother," replied Florence, bending a tender look upon the child.

A woman now appeared upon the scene, and relieved the little girl. By her look, action, and demeanour she was a lady. She advanced, and said, with a faint smile:

"I am Mrs. Lothrop; did you wish to see me? Won't you come in, although you will find my room very poor?"

"Thanks. Milly Prescott gave me your address, and I have called upon you on the strength of her recommendation."

"You are very kind; it is not often that ladies call upon me."

Florence and the gentlemen entered. There was only one seat, and Florence, of course, took that.

Upon a cot lay a little child, its thin face—so thin that the blue veins were painfully apparent—held in the clutch of pain. Upon each cheek was a hectic flush, the flush, alas, that tells of death. Florence

arose and bent over the child; the little lips parted and broke into a smile, as she beheld the sweet face looking down upon her. Florence sighed. How the hazel eye sparkled, with her auburn hair pushed gently aside on her temples, while the calm little face, wreathed in holy resignation, was turned pitifully up to hers.

The tears trembled upon Florence's eyelids, as she thought of the beautiful child, and its surroundings.

Florence dashed a tear from her eye, and said:

"She is a beautiful child. I hope heaven will spare her to you."

"Alas, I fear she must die; but I have one consolation, she will be far happier in heaven than she has ever been here."

A heavy cough resounded from the other side of the room, which seemed to suggest something to Mrs. Lothrop's mind, and she remarked:

"Miss Ormsby, I have neglected to introduce you to a friend of mine; one who has done me many kindnesses."

And Mrs. Lothrop led her across the room, where, upon a wooden box, sat a heavily-bearded man, a hard, cynical expression upon his features, his head bent down, and his hat crushed nearly over his eyebrows.

To the young lady's polite greeting, he returned a few unintelligible words, in a voice which seemed to come from the lowest regions of his stomach.

Florence thought that, to say the least, he was very ill-bred, but still there was something attractive about the man, in spite of his boorishness.

"You must not mind him, my dear Miss Florence," said Mrs. Lothrop. "He has his odd ways, but is in reality a very kind and considerate person."

"What is that you are saying about me?" snapped Mr. Hardman.

"Oh, nothing, sir, of any consequence."

"Ugh! about as much as women's talk generally amounts to," he grumbled, and then drove his hands into his pockets, fixed his gaze upon the floor, and subsided.

In the meantime, and without paying any attention to the remarks of the taciturn gentleman, Florence had been quietly conversing with Mrs. Lothrop. Then she again kissed the invalid child.

For a moment little Annie clung to her neck, then gently disengaging her arms, and pressing a kiss upon the pink lips, Florence stated her intention of leaving them.

The gentlemen rose. Florence held out her hand to Mrs. Lothrop, and the latter grasped it with cordiality; as 'twas withdrawn, she felt a parcel slip into her hand, and before she could say a word, the door had closed, and Florence and the gentlemen had disappeared.

After threading again the numerous labyrinths and windings of that rickety building, they reached the street, entered the carriage, and the horses' heads were turned homeward.

"Well, Clarence, how do you feel after the sights that have greeted our eyes?"

"I feel ashamed of myself, and as if I ought to thank heaven for being blessed with such a noble sister."

"Amen to that!" said Rowe, fervently.

So fervently that Florence looked up in surprise. His face was sad and his eyes downcast. His heart had been full to overflowing with admiration of the new and beautiful points of her character, which had that day been brought to his notice for the first time. His whole volume of feeling found vent in that one word, "amen."

"Please to withhold your compliments, gentlemen. Mr. Rowe, you appear unhappy."

"Me? Oh—ah—yes," he confusedly stammered.

"I was thinking of what we have seen."

"And it has touched your heart," she rejoined.

"But let us not be sad. I hope it will teach us more fully to appreciate our bounteous blessings, and pity and assist those whose lot is cast in low places, and who are obliged to struggle with that miserable and worst of human ills—poverty."

"It has taught me a lesson which I hope will not be lost upon me," remarked Clarence.

"I shall remember it as long as I live," added Rowe.

Again the carriage stopped, and this time in front of a grocer's shop. Florence alighted, with the assistance of Mr. Rowe; while her brother remained in the carriage.

With a feeling of approbation, respect and growing love, did Charles Rowe watch her.

He had called her an "angel" the first time that his eyes beheld her. His words were confirmed; she was an angel of charity and mercy, and he thought what a paradise this earth would be, if there were more like her. At last, having ordered all that she required, she paid the bill, with a strict injunction to send the articles to their respective directions immediately.

"Why, how fast the time has passed," remarked Florence; "it is nearly six o'clock."

"Time always flies, when we are engaged in doing good," answered Rowe, with a smile of praise.

As they spoke they entered the parlour, where Mr. Ormsby and his wife were waiting to receive them.

"Well, my darling," said her father, "how have you enjoyed your birthday, and where have you been, and what have you been doing?"

"In one respect I have been very happy, in another I have been very sad. I have been to—"

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enacted. The features of the mother wore a happy smile, she gazed fondly upon the child, and proceeded to place the table for tea—tea, a luxury which, anterior to this, they could only partake of once a month, and then scantily, was now furnished to them in abundance. The butter, the soft white bread, and juicy steaks, composed for them a banquet.

Little Annie ceased toying with the orange which now lay upon the bed, and turned her attention to the preparations for tea. And such preparations! To her it was a wonder and delight. She lay still, a faint smile coming over her features, and then she would kiss the orange, meantime murmuring the name that had become so dear to her. If Florence could have seen the joy of those down-trodden people, would not her own happiness have been increased tenfold? If she could have witnessed the transition from wretchedness and penury to comparative affluence, would not she have been doubly blessed?

The subject under discussion in the Ormsby mansion at the time the events recorded above were transpiring, was what watering-place the family should adjourn to for the summer.

The first thing necessary to Clarence's happiness, was to secure the company of his friend Rowe. That gentleman at first demurred, and very strongly, but the whole pleading power of the family was brought out to influence him. The rest he could withstand, but when Floss bent her eyes upon him, and asked him to go to please her, that annihilated his objections; her he could not refuse, and accordingly accepted the invitation. More closely he felt the chains tighten around him; his heart was bound, his spirit was weak to resist, and he was a captive to the soft tones of the voice, and the bright eyes of the fairy that stood before him.

CHAPTER X.

BRIGHTON! Fair Brighton! Fashion here held its sway. Beauty made this its emporium. Past young men, studious young men, and indolent young men sought this place. Ministers, lawyers, doctors, actors, and all trades and classes of men, who had the requisite amount of money to pay their bills, went thither to spend their summer months.

In a house with a sea view, which Mr. Ormsby had the good fortune to secure, lived himself and his wife.

Under the verandah, watching the waves as they dashed their white-topped crests upon the beach, and the vessels as they passed and repassed, were Clarence, his friend, and Florence. The latter was as happy as a bird just freed from its cage, and although she did not vent her feelings in words, yet her expression attested to the fact.

"Well, why are both of you so dumb?" said Clarence, breaking the silence.

"I was contemplating the beauty of the waters," replied Florence, without removing her eyes from the dancing waves.

"And I was engaged in the same laudable occupation," added Rowe, smiling.

"If you will turn your eyes to the left," replied Clarence, "you will see a lady and gentleman, both very handsome."

"Ah, yes, they approach us. I think I know the lady, though the gentleman is a stranger to me," observed Florence.

"Who is the lady?" asked her brother.

"You know her. It is Alice Morse."

"That Alice? She has changed very much; when I went away she was very plain."

"Yes, indeed, time has done much for her. She is now a belle; but our conversation must cease, they near us."

Miss Morse and her companion now advanced. The former's eyes rested upon Florence. Withdrawing her arm very unceremoniously, she rushed towards her friend, and clasping both hands, exclaimed:

"Why, my dear Florence! How glad I am to see you! When did you come?"

Florence cordially returned the salutation, and for a few moments they held each others' hands, and talked away very volubly, leaving the gentlemen in a very unpleasant situation.

"Oh, Clarence, Mr. Rowe, I beg your pardon," said Florence, recollecting herself. "Allow me to make you acquainted with my friend, Miss Morse."

The gentlemen bowed profoundly, and Clarence remarked:

"I believe we have met before."

"Ah, yes; since then you have travelled on the Continent," she replied, opening a conversation.

"Alice," whispered Florence in her ear, "you have left your companion in a very embarrassing position."

"Oh, yes," and, arising, she hurried to her companion, and said, "Really, Mr. Fairleigh, I beg a thousand pardons. I was so overjoyed to meet my

old friend that I forgot for the moment. Allow me to present you."

He smiled, it was by an effort, however, and accompanied her to her friends, to each of whom he was formally introduced in succession.

As Rowe grasped the stranger's hand, their eyes met. It was but an instant's glance, yet in that one look Rowe read his whole character, as though it were a book laid open before him. The impression he received was not favourable; the restless, gray eyes betokened watchfulness, the small, thin lips denoted acuteness as well as sensuality. He had a habit of biting them at intervals, to which fact many would attach no significance, but to a practised physiognomist like our friend Rowe, it was of account. He was what would be termed a handsome man, but thought Rowe, "remove those whiskers and moustache, and he would be actually ugly as well as homely." The more he looked at the man, and the only chance he had was when his eyes were not upon him, the more strength his first impression received; and as he noticed the aquiline nose, on each side of which small lines curved down towards the mouth, the one little wrinkle on the outside rim of each eye, his thoughts received additional corroboration. When he smiled and displayed the glistening teeth, then the eyes seemed to emit more of that meaning light, the lines on either side grew more distinct, and the indented curvatures on both sides of his nose became a conspicuous part of his features. His smile to Rowe was revolting, so strong had his dislike become. Consequently he sat and listened, without advancing any remarks. Again was he disgusted when he heard the cockney drawl, which so many affect.

Clarence was interested in conversing with Miss Morse, and paid no attention to his friend. Presently Mr. Albert Fairleigh proposed a walk upon the beach. All assented, with the exception of Mr. Rowe.

"Come, Charl—oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Rowe, I will take your left arm, and then I shall have two knights—come," said Florence.

"Pray excuse me, Miss Ormsby," he replied, "I think I will adjourn to my room; I have a severe headache, which I do not think the sun will improve."

He had felt gladdened as he heard his first name partially escape her lips. It showed him that he was in her mind. But walk with that man, and she dividing her attention? Never!

A shade passed over Florence's face. She thought his tone odd, and his manner remarkably constrained; but smiling her reply, she placed her arm within that of Mr. Fairleigh, and started down the promenade, followed by Clarence and his companion.

Rowe walked rapidly to the cottage, entered without being seen, for which he was very glad, and proceeded silently to his room, which was in the front of the house, and commanded an excellent view of the beach. Throwing himself into a chair opposite the window, and bringing forth the inevitable togar, he prepared to enjoy his solitude and give his thoughts full scope. First, as a matter of course, Florence occupied his mind. The many scenes in which she had taken a part, and the pleasant hours he had passed with her, moved in panoramic view before him. Her love he had seen exemplified in her devotion to her parents and brother; her gentleness was perceptible in her every look and action. Her goodness of heart? Ah, he had witnessed an illustration of that which commanded the admiration of his very soul. These thoughts were pleasant; but the knowledge of all this only served to place her farther above him in reality, and draw her nearer to him in thought. 'Twas an unhappy position for him; he loved and his love was hopeless, but still he kept on loving. These thoughts held possession of his mind, when chancing to cast his eye towards the beach he saw the dear object of his affections, laughing and talking more with that "snob! That automaton, manufactured by the tailor, barber, and boot-black! That rapid, deceiving villain!" Rowe said the above words to himself, confidently, because he knew it to his own satisfaction, yet had no tangible proofs of it.

He watched them with bitter feelings. She whom he loved, resting upon the arm of that man. But reason asked him, "why these thoughts?" "True enough," he murmured, half-aloud. "Why should I presume to dictate her actions even in my own mind; I have no right to do so. I am foolish, ay, worse than foolish, I am pursuing a phantom, which sometime will lead me into the slough of despair, and there I shall sink."

"Am I a fool?" he ejaculated, pressing his hands to his throbbing brow. "Why don't I tear myself away from this that distracts me? I must! I will! My contentment, my peace, my future usefulness in life demands it. Each moment I linger, only make the chains that bind me, harder to break." He paused in his excited walk, and continued his soliloquy.

In Mrs. Lothrop's abode, a like scene was being

"And yet it will be like taking my heart from my body to leave her; but painful, sorrowful, as it will be, it must be done! At any cost it must be accomplished."

As he said this, he threw himself upon the bed, and endeavored to calm his agitated mind.

Meanwhile the two couples upon the beach were gaily conversing.

"Miss Ormsby," said Mr. Fairleigh, with a yawn, "that Mistaw Wove appears wewy little inclined to talk."

"He certainly is free from garrulity," answered his companion.

"Aw, yess, doubtless a wewy good quality, but I like to see a fellow make himself agreeable."

"His ideas and yours may differ as to the manner of doing so," replied Florence, reservedly.

"Twice again. Let me see, aw! he is the fellow that your brother had for a companion on the continent, isn't he?"

"Yes, Clarence became acquainted with him there."

"What trade has he in view? He closely resembles a mechanic," sneered Fairleigh.

"His profession is that of medicine," responded Florence, with severity in her tone.

"Aw, indeed! Wewly, I shouldn't like to have him took for a doctor; he doesn't look as though he could cut a piece of wood smoothly, much more a limb."

"Mr. Fairleigh, if you continue to cast aspersions upon my friend's ability, and hurl innuendoes at his personal appearance, I must decline your escort. I respect him for a noble man, as he is—a man of talent, education, and refinement."

"Aw, now wewly, Miss Ormsby, I have to beg your pardon. I assure you my purpose was to ascertain if you would defend a friend, so that if evaw anybody should insinuate aught against me, I should know whether you would defend me. You see my little game? It was wewy clever, wasn't it, aw? You understand? Oh, certainly, of course you do, aw!"

She raised her eyes, and looking him full in the face, queried:

"Was that really your purpose?"

"Upon my hew, as a gentleman!" returned Fairleigh, placing his hand upon his breast. "I wewy often try such little subterfuges, to try young ladies' characters. Ah, ahem, you see young ladies are so wewy apt to be deceitful now-a-days, that a fellow has to be wewy circumspect. Ah, ahem, you surely understand me, my dear Miss Ormsby?"

"You wished to test my character, did you?"

"Oh, no, wewly, you quite missapprehend me. Yes, you see—ahem—that's not it—goodness! Aw, you understand the habit is wewy hard to overcome. Wewly! Why, my dear Miss Ormsby, you? Quite impossible! I have heard so many speak so wewy highly of you, I should nevaw think of such a thing. It's the habit, you see, the habit, you—ahem! you understand, I hope?"

"I think I do," said Florence, drily.

Fairleigh perceiving that his compliment had not the desired effect, remained silent for a few moments.

(To be continued.)

MICHEL-DEVER.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE next few weeks of May Thorne's life passed as an enchanted dream. She was received by Mrs. Balfour with extreme kindness, and Alice and Louise vied with each other in their efforts to render her happy. Her father treated her with a degree of consideration never before accorded to her, and his betrothed wife seemed interested in her and anxious to win her confidence and affection.

The pretensions of Sinclair had been fully discussed between Mr. Thorne and Mrs. Balfour, and such inquiries were made by the former as satisfied him that the young lawyer was one of the rising men of the day, who was sure to win both fame and fortune in the career he had chosen. Indiscreet as May had been, fate had favoured her in saving her from bestowing her affection on one unworthy of it.

Sinclair held a friendly interview with his future father-in-law, and was permitted to prosecute his suit with Miss Thorne, with the hope of having an early day named for the marriage, provided May would sign certain papers her father had caused to be prepared.

The possession of his daughter's fortune had become most important to Mr. Thorne, for at this crisis he heard respecting the bond given to Andrew Courtney so long ago. A letter came to him from Robert Orme demanding immediate payment of the claim which had been transferred by the winner to Rosine C. Lapierre, and placed by her in Orme's hand for collection.

This dreaded claim had hung as an incubus upon Thorne for years, and now that it was presented, he had saved little more than half the sum needed to liquidate it. Thorne wondered now what madness could have induced him to stake so much at the gaming-table; had the winner insisted on immediate payment he must have been irretrievably ruined, but the interval that had elapsed since the bond was given, had enabled him to accumulate enough to release him, providing May's thousands were added to his savings. He had no scruples as to possessing himself of them, for he said to himself that he would make it up to her by setting aside a certain portion of his annual income, and investing it for her benefit.

Thorne permitted the sunshine of perfect happiness to fall for a few weeks upon the path of his daughter, in the certainty that she would make any worldly sacrifice sooner than relinquish what was so unutterably precious to her. He said nothing more to her of the price that he intended to exact for the consent to her marriage, but he made it very clear to Sinclair that the money must be paid into his hands, or all hope of gaining him over abandoned. The lover was willing, nay, almost anxious to prove his perfect disinterestedness by taking May without a penny to her dower; but after she fully explained to him the ground of her scruples, he could not urge her to violate the promise she had made to her dead mother, and the subject was tacitly ignored by all three of them till the time for action arrived.

This was postponed at the request of Claire. On the evening after the receipt of Robert Orme's letter the two sat together in Mr. Balfour's private parlour. The rest of the party had gone to the beach, but Claire complained of a slight headache, and declined going with them. When Thorne heard that she was left alone, he returned at once to the hotel and joined her.

He found her sitting beside an open window which looked towards the restless, moaning sea, with an expression on her face which told that her own heart fully sympathised with the low monotone which came to her ear as a wall over lost hopes and buried affections.

A fearful struggle had for days been going on in the soul of Claire. To crush this man beneath her imperious feet had been her one object in seeking him again, yet in spite of her struggles to maintain the supremacy of her will, she found her resolutions sapped hour by hour, by the insidious love that awakened from its long slumber into as new and as vivid a life as in those early days in which she had trusted him so implicitly, only to be forsaken.

In vain did she recapitulate all her wrongs to herself, and seek to crush the interest he inspired—for she could not give up her long-cherished schemes, and lay aside all thoughts of bringing home to him the anguish he had inflicted on her—though in her heart was the conviction that in crushing him she would destroy herself.

Mrs. Balfour constantly urged her to reveal herself in her true character to Mr. Thorne, exchange mutual forgiveness, and accept such happiness as might be found in renewing the ties so long broken; but Claire was not prepared for this: in spite of the love she acknowledged to herself she cherished for him, she could not forego the desire to strike as severe a blow upon his heart as he had once struck to hers. She did not trust him; she thought if she again placed herself utterly in his power; if she admitted that he had regained all his old influence over her; Thorne would be capable of abusing it as he had once already done.

In spite of his adoring protestations of affection, Claire did not believe Walter Thorne capable of treating any woman who stood to him in the relation of wife with the tenderness she would have a right to demand. His temper was haughty and overbearing; he considered himself before every other human being, while she, on her side, was exacting, and not less fiery than himself.

This evening Claire had gone over the whole ground again, and with a weary sigh, muttered:

"We can never be happy together again, so why should I hesitate as to walking in the course I have already marked out for myself! I am weak, untrue to myself, to waver a single moment. How I can forget the past so far as to welcome his presence with a happy thrill at my heart is more than I can understand. After all he has made me suffer, I should loathe the sound of his voice, yet—yet it gladdens me in spite of myself. Ah! if I could only believe in him again—if I could!"

"If you could do what?" asked the voice of him of whom she was thinking, in most softly-modulated tones. "Mrs. Balfour told me you were not quite well this evening, and I came back to cheer you up and make you forget your indisposition, if that be possible."

In spite of herself, the light leaped to Claire's eyes, and a sweet smile curved her lips.

"I am not much indisposed; I have only a slight headache, brought on by too intense thought. You had better go back to the others, and leave me to think out, and solve the problem of my own destiny."

"I thought that had already been accomplished, Claire. Your destiny in the future is to be loved, and petted as woman never was before by an adoring husband. This is the thirteenth of the month, and in another week I shall have the right to call you mine. I count the days which lie between myself and the realisation of the brightest dream my heart has ever cherished."

"How can you love me thus when I have treacherously usurped the place I came to ask you to restore to her you once professed to adore? Is it that you find in my nature a want of faith which makes us kindred souls? When Claire learns that I have listened to your beguiling tongue, what will she think? what will she have a right to say of me?"

Thorne lightly replied:

"What matters it to you, or to me? She cannot come between us to mar our happiness, and I have long ago ignored every claim she may fancy herself to have upon me. If Claire would be mine again it would not be through any love for me, but through her desire to regain the position from which she was thrust, through no fault of my own, remember. It was my father's will that severed us—now it is mine that widens the breach between us. You came, saw, and conquered; and she will have no right to complain that my heart awoke to new life beneath the influence of your smiles. I own that I am flattered that I have conquered her who was considered invincible, but I do not impute to you any thought of treachery towards your cousin. I won you to love me through the conviction in your own heart that I should never return to her."

"We are thought much alike—if she had come hither herself perhaps the result might have been different."

"We will not speculate on possibilities—I accept facts as they stand—and I am more than satisfied with the exchange I have made."

"Yet Mrs. Balfour assured me that you sought me with the hope that you could learn something of Claire, that you might do her such tardy justice as lay in your power."

"I might have had such a thought—nay, I admit that I did have it, but it was the offspring of self-interest, I am afraid, more than of any sentimental recollection of what we had once been to each other. I am going to make a confession to you, Claire, and I hope you will not judge me hardly—I have at times in my life been a very reckless man—I have thrown away thousands at the gaming-table, but I pledge you my word never to do so again! It is now nearly four years since I met Andrew Courtney. He played with me one night with such an extraordinary run of luck that he won from me a sum of money which would have impoverished me if he had exacted payment at the time."

"He did not do that—he accepted my bond, and gave me the singular assurance that as long as my wife lived, he should not call on me for a settlement. I know what he meant to do: that bond was to be given to Claire, to use against me in time to come; but I was resolved that she should not triumph in my ruin. I retrenched my expenditure from that day, and I have saved more than half the sum due."

"When Agnes died, I own that for a little while my heart returned to its old allegiance, but I had not then seen you. I thought it would be a good idea to cancel the claim by taking my first wife back, if she would consent to come, therefore I sought information from Ada. I met you at her house, and you know the rest."

"But the conviction on my mind that Claire held the bond against me has been confirmed to-day. I have received a letter from a Mr. Orme in London, who informs me that it has been placed in his hands for collection by Claire Lapierre. Since she cannot reclaim my hand, she seems determined to secure a large portion of my fortune."

Claire withdrew herself from his encircling arm, and coldly said:

"You cannot justly accuse Claire of such an intention, for she refuses to accept any provision from your father's estate, and I assure you that she is quite independent through the munificence of her half-brother."

"Yes, she refuses what she has every claim to, for the purpose of showing her contempt for me—but she is older now, and understands the value of money better. Since she has heard nothing from you, she doubtless considers your mission a failure, and consoles herself with striking a blow at my property. Gold is a panacea for many ills, and she evidently intends to get as much of mine as she possibly can. So much for her former disinterestedness."

All the old resentment of Claire surged up at this. This man had never understood, or appreciated her. He had crushed her, and she would no longer waver in her determination to repay him, cost what it might to herself. She said:

"We will no longer discuss Claire or her motives, if you please. She has demanded this money of you, and you say that you have but half the amount necessary to cancel this debt of honour. If you tell me this as an appeal to me to aid you after we are married, I can only remind you of what I have already told you that my property is so tied up that I can only use the income arising from it."

"I was not thinking of that means of extricating myself from my difficulties, for I had far rather give to you, than rob you of what is your own. There is a way to obtain the money, and I hope you will not shrink from using your influence with my daughter to induce her to lay aside some absurd scruples she has, on the score of a promise she made to her mother. May's fortune will enable me to pay the whole of this debt, and I need not remind you that, at any sacrifice, it must be settled. I should feel disgraced among honourable men if I fail promptly to meet the demand. In a few years, I can return the whole to my daughter."

Claire could with difficulty repress the scornful bitterness she felt as she replied:

"It is a singular code of honour which leads a man to ask such a sacrifice as this from his daughter, and she too on the eve of marriage with a poor man. May will need her fortune more now than a few years hence. Why have you asked so repugnant a service of me as to persuade her to do that which may permanently injure the prospects of herself and her husband?"

"My dear Clara, young Sinclair has assured me that the possession of the few thousands May can claim are of no importance to him. He is so desirous of proving his disinterestedness that he seems rather anxious to have them transferred to me; but my daughter hesitates on the score of that promise to her mother. It will be but a temporary loan to me, and the income arising from Sinclair's profession is amply sufficient to support the young couple in the modest style in which they propose to live. All I ask of you is to disabuse May's mind of the idea that she is committing a wrong by violating her promise to the dead. I think I have a right to the use of this money, for all the wrong and evil of my life sprang from the belief on my father's part that I should gain a magnificent fortune with the woman he compelled me to marry. She brought me nothing but wretchedness; she held the little she possessed absolutely under her own control, and bequeathed every shilling of it to her child. I only ask the use of it for a few years to save me from comparative ruin. I must either sell Thornhill or alienate a large portion of my income to enable me to raise what I need. As the future mistress of my house you should be willing to assist me to retain it. May already has great confidence in you, and I am sure she will do this, if you assure her that it will not be wrong to do so."

With sudden animation, Claire exclaimed:

"Thornhill must be retained at all hazards. If that is at stake I must aid you to the best of my ability. Of course, your daughter will sacrifice her own interest sooner than see the home in which she was born and reared pass into the hands of strangers. But I have a delicacy in speaking with May on this subject till after we are married. When she stands to me in the relation of a daughter, I can say to her what would scarcely be proper now."

"My dearest Clara, I thank you sincerely for this concession. You will prevail, as you always do, and a few weeks of delay do not signify. I will write to Mr. Orme and assure him that the whole sum shall be paid within six weeks."

"You may safely do so, for I am certain that I can use such arguments as will convince May that it will be her duty to assist her living father, even if she violates her promise to her dead mother."

Thorne regarded her inquiringly a few moments, and then abruptly asked:

"Why did the prospect of losing Thornhill move you to such sudden animation? You have never seen the place, and its possession cannot be a matter of much importance to you, beautiful as it is. I scarcely think you will care to live there, for the neighbourhood is not a lively one, and such society as L— affords will scarcely be to the taste of so brilliant a woman as you are."

The gathering twilight concealed from him the sudden pallor that overspread her face, and she moved farther from him that he might not detect the shiver that ran through her frame as the memory of that visit to his father's house and all that resulted from it flashed on her mind. She steadied her voice, and replied:

"I have heard such vivid descriptions of the place

from Mrs. Balfour and your daughter that I feel as if I know it well. Besides, there is something literally painful to me in the necessity which compels a man to give up the home of his family; if you can avoid it, do so by all means. I have thought of myself as the mistress of Thornhill, until it seems an integral portion of yourself. I do not wish to make a bridal trip: let us go to your home at once, and spend our honeymoon there. May can prepare to be married within the next few weeks, and under your own roof give her hand to the man of her choice."

"So let it be—I shall have you all to myself there, for we will not summon our friends around us till the time for my daughter's nuptials arrives. Oh, Clara, if you could read my heart—if you could see how proud and happy I am to know that I am the chosen of your heart, you would comprehend the depth and sincerity of the passion with which you have inspired me."

Claire arose, and with a laugh, said:

"I believe I understand all that, Mr. Thorne. You are in earnest now, if you never have been in any of your former wooings. I give you credit for sincerity, yet I fear that your wedded experience with me will bring you little more happiness than you found with your last wife. Let us join the others on the beach now; my headache is gone, and I feel as if the fresh sea air will brighten my spirits."

She threw a black lace shawl over her head, and they went out together. As they walked towards the beach, he gravely asked:

"Why should you have a doubt as to your ability to render me the most blissfully-contented of men? At last I have found what I have long felt the want of, sympathy and affection from the woman on whom my own heart is set. There must be love on both sides, or there can be no real union, as my hapless fate has shown me. I adore you, and I cannot be mistaken in believing that you give me in return a fair equivalent for all I lavish on you."

"Yes, I love you. I cannot resist the power you have over me, I confess it; but I do not glory in it as a woman should in the affection she gives and accepts from her future husband. You are not a good man, Walter Thorne, and only to such is perfect trust given; but such as you are, I love you, and I feel that you are good enough for me. I warn you that we shall not be happy, for we have within us the elements of discord which will make themselves felt. You have your past, and I mine. You have not asked me about my former life, but in good time you shall know what it has been. When that knowledge comes to you, you will understand why a ghost from it will arise to poison all dreams of bliss for me."

She spoke in a low, rapid tone, as if the words were forced from her lips without any volition of her own. Thorne ardently replied:

"I ask to know nothing but that you love me. I know that I am not a good man, but your influence, your sweetness, can restore my better nature. I have grown bitter, hard, and scornful, under the galling yoke I bore so long, but with you all will be life, light, and joy. I know that you, like myself, have had an unhappy wedded experience, but we can atone to each other for all that others have made us suffer. The ghost shall be exorcised, Clara."

"Atonement, retribution, justification—they underlie all the actions of life," she said, in a vague tone, "I shall marry you, but what the end will be, heaven alone only knows."

By this time they had drawn near the promenaders on the beach, and they were speedily surrounded by their own party. Thorne felt a little chilled by Claire's words and manner, and he began to dread that his new castle in the air would crumble into ruins at his feet, but he felt that if Claire were buried with him beneath those ruins it would be a better fate for him than living on without her. She fascinated, enthralled, enchanted him to that degree that he felt as if life would lose all its value and significance without her companionship.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

When they joined their friends the sudden change in her manner electrified him; the vague sadness that had hung around her disappeared, as if by magic, and she laughed and jested with those around her, with even more than her usual animation.

She played and sang, but selected the gayest music she could remember. When she was asked for a sentimental song, she laughed, and said:

"Not to-night: I am not in a pensive mood, and my music always echoes the feelings of my heart."

Towards the close of the evening, Thorne approached her, and said, in a low tone:

"I am glad that the cloud was so temporary. You are a creature of impulse; but I find all your caprices charming."

She looked at him, and asked:

"Do you understand the cause of the reaction of my spirits? No, I see you do not; so I will tell you. I was thinking of what we have determined on—anticipating the days we shall spend in the solitude of Thornhill, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot'—temporarily, I mean, of course. I promise you one month of happiness, at least; for that I owe you."

"You owe me, rather, a life-time of devotion, in return for what I give to you."

With a gay laugh, she replied:

"I always pay my debts to the uttermost farthing. Good night; I feel tired, and my headache has come back. I must go to bed and sleep it off before our journey to-morrow. You know that we leave in the afternoon, but you are not to go with us. You are to stay here, and do penance for your sins till you come to claim me. I cannot have my time monopolised by you while I am preparing for the important event."

"I shall not obey orders. In twenty-four hours I will follow you, but I promise not to encroach upon your other engagements. Good night."

Claire went to her room, but in spite of her alleged headache, she did not retire. She sat beside the open window in that state of unrest which effectually banishes sleep. Now that the crisis of her destiny so nearly approached, she felt a dread and doubt of her own power to carry out the bitter programme she had laid out for herself. She said to herself she would have relented had not Thorne shown such hard indifference to that past which was of such vital moment to her. She felt chilled and revolted at what he had that evening said of the woman who had placed such fatal trust in him. At his hands she surely deserved more consideration. Thorne evidently thought only of himself; for had he not told her that self-interest alone prompted him to think of repairing the wrong he insisted he had been forced to commit.

Yet in spite of all, she knew that she loved him—loved him with that unreasoning passionate clinging which would have led a woman of a different temperament to endure all things at his hands sooner than be separated from him. But she was haughty as Milton's fallen angel, and all her love for him could not stifle the desire for retribution for the past.

She rose at last and threw herself upon the bed, completely worn out with the conflict of feeling through which she had passed. Her head throbbed, but her heart ached far more terribly, for her mind was made up to adhere to her determination.

On the following morning Claire arose at a very late hour; she scarcely touched the breakfast that was brought up to her, though she eagerly drank the strong coffee, hoping it would act as a stimulant, and resting her quivering nerves.

For years she had asserted and believed that her heart was dead, but it seemed suddenly to have awakened into new and more vivid life, if she were to judge of its condition by the bitter pangs that rent it in twain when she thought of all that lay before her in the next four weeks of her life.

When she at length descended to the private room of Mrs. Balfour, she found no one there save Sinclair, who had just come in and asked for Miss Thorne. A message came from May, requesting him to excuse her for half-an-hour, as she was particularly engaged.

When the servant left the room, Claire turned to him, and said:

"I am glad that I came down so opportunely, Mr. Sinclair, for I have something to say to you which is of some interest to yourself."

Claire had watched the young lover with keen eyes, and she believed him worthy of the confidence she was about to repose in him. He smiled, took a seat near her, and prepared to listen, though he was at a loss to know what Madame L'Epine could have to say to him. He admired her very much, but he earnestly hoped that he should be able to withdraw May from her influence at an early day. Sinclair could not understand the fitful temperament of a being so unlike himself, and he was not inclined to place implicit confidence in her as the guardian and maternal counsellor of his future wife.

After a slight pause, Claire said:

"I find it difficult to speak freely on a subject that is important to both you and myself, and I must exact from you a promise that what passes between us this morning shall be considered as confidential."

"Assuredly, madame, if such be your wish. Any confidence you may honour me with shall be held sacred."

"Thank you—I know I can trust you, for I am too good a judge of character to be deceived in you. I understand from Mr. Thorne that the marriage of his daughter with yourself depends on a contingency. Will you be candid with me, and state to me exactly the terms on which he has told you his consent is to be gained?"

Sinclair hesitated a moment, and then frankly replied:



[A CONFERENCE.]

"There is no reason why I should not tell you, madame, since you will so soon be placed in a position that will entitle you to a full knowledge of the whole affair. As the price of his consent to our union, Mr. Thorne demands of May the surrender of her fortune, allowing her to reserve a few thousand pounds to supply her with pin-money, I suppose. So far as I am concerned, I would gladly relinquish the whole of it, for I am able and willing to labour for the support of the woman I marry; but May has some conscientious scruples on the score of a promise she made to her mother just before her death. Mr. Thorne has allowed me to come hither, to aspire openly to his daughter, in the belief that this glimpse of happiness will render May less unwilling to do violence to her sense of right, when she finds our fate dependent on the concession he insists upon. I feel like a man to whom the cup of bliss is proffered only to be withdrawn before the magic draught reaches the lips, but I cannot urge May to do what her conscience may condemn."

"I partly understood this before, but I was not aware that Mr. Thorne made the surrender of his daughter's fortune the absolute condition of his consent to her union with you. I know that it is of vital moment to him to obtain the temporary use of a large sum of money, but I can assure you that it is only a loan, which I give you my word shall be repaid before May has been your wife a week. You may tell her this, and say to her that I have in my hands the power to replace her fortune, with something added to it as a gift from her father, for the accommodation he asks. You must both accept my word alone as a guarantee of repayment, and if you can do so, your marriage shall take place on the twentieth of October, exactly one month after my own."

"Oh, Madame L'Epine, you overwhelm me with your kindness. From yourself, from your own resources, I doubt not the debt will be liquidated, but as you will be Mr. Thorne's wife, and his interests yours, I think May may avail herself of your liberality to regain what is justly her own. I have no interest in it, I wish you to understand that, for I have declared to her from the first that her fortune shall be settled on herself."

With a smile that was very faint and sad, Claire replied:

"It matters not from what source the money is derived, provided it is honestly mine to do with as I please. Proceed with your preparations for your marriage, Mr. Sinclair, and induce May to comply with her father's demands; it is the only way to secure your future, and if it be done at all, it must be

done quickly. I exact, however, from both yourself and Miss Thorne the most profound secrecy as to my agency in this affair. After you are married and gone, I shall let Mr. Thorne know the measures I took to release him from his embarrassment without injury to his daughter's prospects."

"Madame, you are an angel of goodness, and I earnestly beg your pardon for not before appreciating you as you deserve. I place implicit faith in your promises, and I pledge myself that my betrothed shall do the same. May loves you already, and your word will be to her as good as your bond. I feel now as if I have reached firm ground at last, and to you I owe this feeling of security."

"You owe me nothing—I am only trying to remedy an injustice forced by circumstances on the man I am about to marry. Mr. Thorne is not aware of my power to aid him in this strait, and I wish to reserve all knowledge of it till I inform him that the debt has been cancelled and in what manner. I trust to your discretion and that of May to betray nothing."

"Of course we shall both be upon honour; after doing so much for us as you propose, we should be most ungrateful to forestall the pleasant surprise you have prepared for Mr. Thorne."

"No doubt it will be very pleasant," she said, with a slight quiver of her sensitive lips. "I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I have made two young hearts happy. I believe you to be worthy of May, Mr. Sinclair, and I have seen for myself how much in love you are with each other. Your union will be founded on mutual faith and trust, and I believe I am doing right in trying to secure it before—"

She broke off abruptly, and coloured slightly; but at that moment May came in fresh and smiling to greet her lover. She seemed surprised to find him in earnest conversation with Madame L'Epine, but the light in Sinclair's face told her that the interview had been a very pleasant one to him. The young girl said:

"I am glad to see you looking as well as usual, Madame L'Epine, but cousin Ada is afraid that you will not be able to make the journey this afternoon. As you did not come down to breakfast, she feared that your headache still troubled you."

"I am perfectly recovered from that, as I will assure her myself. I am quite ready, and a little anxious for the fitting."

She kissed the brow of May, and whispered: "Mr. Sinclair has something to say to you from me—trust your fate in my hands, May, and all shall come right."

She left the room, and May turned towards her

lower for an explanation of her words. When it had been given, she said:

"I would trust her to any extent, Harry, for she is a noble and warm-hearted woman. I am glad she has afforded me this loophole of escape, for I have wished a thousand times that I could find any plausible excuse for disobeying mamma's commands. A loan for a few weeks, with Madame L'Epine as security for its repayment, is very different from what papa asked. We shall be happy at last, thanks to her."

"Then commence your preparations at once, my love, for the twentieth of October has been named by her for our marriage. I am more grateful for that, I believe, than for the promise to repay your fortune."

"So soon! That is but five weeks from today."

"I wish it were only five days for my part."

That afternoon the whole party left, with the exception of Thorne. He reluctantly remained behind; but Claire forbade him to come with them, and he obeyed, though he followed them almost immediately. The week that intervened before their marriage was occupied by shopping and mantuamakers. Claire's wardrobe was so elegant and extensive, that she needed but little beside a travelling dress and veil; but the *trousseaux* of May was to be provided. This Mrs. Balfour took upon herself; and the heart of the younger bride elect was elated by the beautiful and becoming things purchased for her.

May relinquished to her father the control of her money; and he, in his turn, was very liberal in the outfit he presented to her. At his request, she reluctantly consented to lay aside the mourning she wore for her mother, but his manner towards her had changed so much, that she could refuse him nothing; and she remembered that it would be rather awkward for her to wear the robes consecrated to the dead, when her mother's place was filled by another.

May went with Sinclair to see the home he had prepared for her, and found Nancy installed as house-keeper. Her delight was boundless when she learned that all obstacles were cleared away, and that her young lady would, in a few weeks, be installed as mistress of the pretty suburban cottage.

The marriage of the long-severed husband and wife was very private. It took place in the cathedral at an early hour of the morning, and they set out for Thornhill immediately after the ceremony was performed.

May was to remain with the Balfours three weeks longer, and then the whole were to be reunited in her father's house, and remain there till after her wedding.

(To be continued.)



[THE POISONED GOMLET.]

THE FLOWER GIRL.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SIR MORTIMER, overcome by his emotions of joy and surprise, as much, nay more, for the sake of his mother, to whom this intelligence would be as the opening to her gates of heaven, awaited with impatience the return of the baron.

Lady Lottie and Lauretta, absorbed in conversation of the past, had scarcely noticed the sudden departure of Sir Albert, while rugged Andrew Tarl, phlegmatic by nature, regarded everything in calm silence, and half slumbered as he leaned upon his partisan.

Meanwhile the baron had hastened below, where he found a tall and powerfully-framed man, some forty-five years of age, of noble yet melancholy features, and clad in the dress of a German merchant; though as this man paced the hall the baron could have sworn that there was armour of linked steel hidden beneath the peaceful garb.

He turned round boldly as the baron advanced, and the two gazed earnestly upon one another.

"Albert, my dear friend," said the stranger, extending his arms wide. "But how changed!"

"Henry, my noble comrade! Alive!" replied the baron, as they embraced. "Has the grave given up its own?"

"Thank heaven, I have never been in the grave, my friend, unless I may call four stone walls of an accursed German dungeon a grave. In such I have been these twenty years and more."

"We thought, and so did all your friends, that you perished on Towton field."

"True; and I did very nearly, for I was struck down by Guy, Earl of Warwick, and when I regained my consciousness I found myself in what, for a terrible moment, I thought a coffin, though it proved to be a large oaken chest. Heaven knows who placed me therein, and who lifted the massive lid and so enabled me to get out. That is a mystery which has often pressed heavily upon my mind. I had barely regained my reason, when the lid was raised and a beautiful lady stood bending over me, crying, 'Oh, let me take your place, for I care not what becomes of me now!' She seemed wildly mad, but I had no time nor heart to question her. Escape was all I thought of, and as I knew ere I was struck down by Warwick, that King Henry had lost the day, I fled from the spot, managed to escape, after some weeks of hiding, from England to France. There I remained, until by chance I heard that my bride was slain by

Roger Vagram, and that he was declared Earl De Montfort.

"I was almost penniless, and as I feared his assassins would find me out, assumed a false name and joined a band of free-lances, hoping to gain enough in a single raid on the Germans to enable me to return to England and take vengeance upon Roger Vagram."

"King Edward, I know, was well disposed to make me his friend, and had fortune befriended me as it did him, all would have been well. But I was captured by a band of German riders, and given into the avaricious hands of a German baron, who, suspecting that I was some great English lord, refused to liberate me without receiving an enormous ransom."

"This ransom I could no more pay than I could fly. So I told Baron Barghoos, as he was called, who and what I was. To this he replied:

"Your party is down just now, and your king and queen as poor as mice in a miser's chest. Let us wait until your party rises again, and then your friends will pay the ransom."

"So he held me a close prisoner in a dungeon, where I wonder madness or death came not upon me, for he imprisoned me until he died, waiting for the house of Lancaster to destroy the house of York. He died, thank heaven, some six months ago, and his son, who succeeded him, opened my dungeon door, saying I was a tax upon his castle larder, and bade me go for a pauper Englishman."

"I would I had that knave under my thumb," said Sir Albert. "The evil one, no doubt, has the father; and may the same soon take the son."

"So, ragged and penniless, I was thrust from the castle Barghoos," continued Earl Henry, "but fortune gave me a friend in a rich pedler, who took me into his service."

"An English earl the lackey of a German pedler!" exclaimed Sir Albert.

"Aye, and was not Albert the Great for a time a cook's scullion?" replied the earl, smiling. "Well, my pedler had been lately in England, and from him I learned the current history of the last twenty years, and resolved to return to my native land and see what could be done towards vengeance upon Roger Vagram, and if possible, regain my lost earldom."

"In my wanderings I met Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, who received me warmly, and furnished me with means to visit London, telling me, too, of the intended invasion in August next, and asking me to co-operate with a certain Sir Mortimer Du Vane, in whom he places great confidence."

"Sir Mortimer du Vane, said you?"

"The same." A knight of much fame on the Con-

tinental. I have arrived in London within less than an hour, and as the Earl of Richmond told me you were his friend in the affair afoot, and especially as I knew you to be my old friend and almost brother I—"

"You hastened to me, as was right," interrupted the baron, again cordially embracing his visitor. "Right welcome you are; but take care not to let it leak out that Earl Henry De Montfort lives, and is in England, or your life will be lost. I marvel that the German baron permitted you to keep this dagger."

"Nor did he, the knave. He robbed me of that as of everything else, and sold it to a Jew. While I wandered with my peddling master it fell in my way, and hailing it as a bright omen, I purchased it. But no one need know that I am more than Herr Schmidt, the German silk merchant, except you and old Tom Bell there."

"Did he recognise you?"

"Not so. But I know he was a faithful fellow, and a prying knave, who might be offended should he discover what we may trust to him. My late pedler master, Herr Fitzgraaf, is in London, no doubt, as he set out for England a few days before I did. Yet he has never known my true name."

"Be careful, my friend, for he may have learned more than you think he has," said the baron.

And so he had, unfortunate man. Herr Fitzgraaf had learned enough to make him visit England to sell his secret to Roger Vagram; but if the reader desires to know what befell the master-pedler in London, let him recall what we related in a former chapter, for the victim of the assassin-spear, Barab, was Herr Fitzgraaf, the German master-pedler and merchant.

Thus Fate so ordered it, that but for the wickedness of Roger Vagram's accomplices, the long imprisoned earl would have speedily fallen into the hands of his most bitter enemy.

Of this, however, the two friends knew nothing, and so the baron repeated his words:

"Beware of the German. Trust to no one—and yet, there are those above whom you may trust. My wife and Sir Mortimer du Vane."

"So the knight is here? That is fortunate, for I would make his acquaintance as speedily as possible."

"You shall. Come, follow me. What now? There is a summons at the rear entrance, Bell. See to it," said the baron, as he began to move towards the library. "This hath been a night of alarm."

While old Bell hobbled away to learn who was at the rear door, the baron returned to the library, followed by the disguised earl.

"I will first see how they look upon each other," thought the baron, smiling under his beard, "for my life upon it, Sir Mortimer Du Vane is the son of the earl, since Lady Lottie has told me the body of Mabel St. Orme was never found, though it was believed she was murdered—aye, and suspicion pointed sharply towards Siballa, the sorceress, and Roger Vagran at the time. Earl Henry believes that his bride of six months perished, and of course that her unborn child perished with her. Wait, we will see how father and son, if such they be, regard each other; though I suspect Sir Mortimer believes himself to be the son of Earl Henry."

They entered the library, and the baron introduced his visitor simply as Herr Schmidt, of Germany. But Sir Mortimer had overheard the words spoken by the baron as he looked at the dagger, as well as those of old Tom Bell, and he fixed his eyes piercingly upon the noble features of the disguised earl.

"Sir Mortimer Du Vane," said the earl, "I hear you a letter from one over the sea, and rejoice in the commission which affords me the acquaintance of so famous a knight. I did not expect to meet so young a man the owner of so great a name."

"Nor I so great a man the owner of so common a name, my lord," replied Sir Mortimer.

And as his hand clasped that of the earl, his soul rose to his lips.

He trembled and continued:

"Pardon me, my lord, for I overheard that which told me your true name, and yet you know my mother under another."

"Your mother, Sir Mortimer?" repeated the earl, amazed. "I have never had the pleasure, I am sure, of seeing your mother. How old are you, Sir Mortimer?"

"No matter for that, Earl Henry. You have known my mother, for her name was Mabel St. Orme."

"Mabel St. Orme?" Not the Mabel St. Orme whom I knew. Impossible; for she must have died before you were born, Sir Albert, what meaneth this?"

"My lord, I am the son of Mabel St. Orme and Ethelbert Clair, and Ethelbert Clair was Henry, Earl De Montfort," said Sir Mortimer, as he knelt before his father.

"Sir Mortimer," exclaimed the earl, much amazed, "this declaration staggers me; for though it is true that I married Mabel St. Orme under the name of Ethelbert Clair, she never lived to bear me a child; nor did she ever know that Ethelbert Clair was Henry De Ros, Earl De Montfort. Look not so grieved, Sir Mortimer, for I would that heaven had given me so noble a son. No doubt you believe all that you allege; yet no one knew these facts except myself and Sir Albert, whose oath of secrecy I know he has kept inviolate."

"Not one word of the matter has escaped my lips," said Sir Albert.

"Did not Nicholas Flame know it all?" asked Sir Mortimer, quickly.

"He did; but the knowledge perished with him on Towton field," replied the earl, who continued to gaze earnestly and kindly upon the agitated and noble face of the kneeling knight.

"He did not die, my lord; he lives. Nicholas Flame lives, and will soon be here," urged Sir Mortimer.

"He is here!" exclaimed the printer, rushing into the library. "My lord! Is it true as old Bell tells me? Alive! Now heaven bless this hour!"

The earl found his hands pressed to the lips of his former squire, and recognising the bluff and honest face as he gazed upon it, he exclaimed:

"My faithful foster brother! Nicholas! good, kind, devoted heart, come to my bosom."

"Wait, my lord; there are two whom right to receive that caress before me is greater than mine," said the printer. "Sir Mortimer is your lordship's lawful son, for Lady Mabel escaped to give him birth and—"

"And she—my wife—does she live yet?"

At that moment old Bell came into the library, followed by the mother of Sir Mortimer, to whose hand clung little Flaydilla.

"This is my mother, who was Mabel St. Orme," cried Sir Mortimer, springing to his feet and grasping his mother's hands. "Look, Earl Henry! Is she not—"

"Ethelbert! My husband!" pealed from the lips of her whom we have called Madam Clair, as she extended her arms towards the earl.

"It is Mabel! Great heaven, she did not die! My wife, my love, my bride! This meeting repays me for all my years in the dungeons of Germany."

It was several moments before the excess of delight attendant upon this joyous and unexpected reunion of fond and faithful hearts, so long separated, allowed much coherence of speech or action.

The earl and his countess wept for joy in each other's arms, and then remembering their noble son, mutually unfolded him in their loving embrace.

The baron and baroness, eager to accept the belief that Lauretta was, indeed, their daughter, despite the slender evidence before them, each held a hand of the lovely girl, and promised her their love and protection, in any event.

While they were thus absorbed in different emotions of doubt and joy, and while Andrew, Nicholas, and Bell, gazed on with eyes moist with sympathy, a sharp cry of terror from little Flaydilla attracted the attention of all to her.

The child had not been noticed since her entrance with the mother of Sir Mortimer. Modest and retiring in nature, she shrank from being observed by so many strangers, and, while her sweet and charming face expressed her wonder at all that was passing, her lips remained silent.

She saw that Sir Mortimer and his mother—the two, and the only two, beings on earth dear to her—were greatly, yet not painfully agitated, and patiently awaited their kind notice of herself.

Still her eyes wandered from face to face, and then about the library, with strange interest. While she gazed she saw flutter in at an open window a thing which had ever been an object of terror to her, the monstrous owl of the sorceress.

The ugly bird perched himself upon the window-sill for a second, glared around with his great eyes, and then flew heavily to a bracket of stag-horns nailed to the wall, where, alighting, he replied to the scream of the little girl with a wild and unearthly "Too-who!"

"It is the four-feathered owl of the sorceress," cried Nicholas Flame. "He is seldom far from his mistress; so beware, my masters, of sudden interruption."

"Here's an end to him; and may the same befall his mistress," said the printer, snatching up a bow, which had rested harmlessly many a year in its place, and fitting an arrow to the string.

The shaft was true to its aim, and the slaughtered owl fell heavily to the floor, pierced through and through.

"So, ho!" cried Sir Albert, laughing. "The bird has died by the same weapon, if tradition be true, that slew William Rufus in the New Forest, scarcely four hundred years ago. That bow and arrow, though not the string, says tradition, were those used by Sir Walter Tyrrel, near Malwood Keep, when, instead of the hart, he slew the king. But, my little girl, why do you seem so affrighted?"

"I do not know. I see so many things here of which I have dreamt, and then in come the owl that so often waked me from my dreams by digging his claws into my face and neck. She had me yesterday, that bad old woman—"

"Ho! then you are the little child whom I saw struggling in the grasp of the sorceress," interrupted the baron.

"Yes," replied the child, feeling elated by the notice she received, for Lady Mabel kissed her fondly, "and I think I know what is in that box."

She pointed to a large ebony box, inlaid with silver and pearl, which rested upon a small table.

"How should you know, little one? You have never been in this room until now, and that box has never been out of it—at least not for ten years," remarked the baron.

Flaydilla looked abashed for a moment, but soon rallied as she saw the kind face of the baron smiling, and said:

"Is there not a great book in it, full of beautiful pictures, red, white, yellow and blue, black, green and gold—pictures of the Virgin and of the Saints?"

"Now, who told her that?" exclaimed the baron, in surprise.

"My dreams," replied Flaydilla, who mistook the pictures of her relative memory for dreams. "I dream, oh, so often, of a noble, pretty lady showing me those beautiful pictures."

"Sir Mortimer," asked the baroness, who had been gazing intently at the child, "who is this little fairy girl, and why is it that she so much resembles this maiden at my side?"

"She is a little unknown," replied Lady Mabel, as Flaydilla ran to look at the ancient missal taken from the box by the baron.

"The infamous Siballa Thornbuck, the vile sorceress, who attempted to strangle and drown me, has had something to do with the mystery which surrounds Flaydilla."

"Oh heaven! can I hope!" almost gasped the baroness, as she sprang toward the child. "Is heaven about to restore to me both of my lost babes?"

"Hist!" whispered the baron, as he clasped his wife in his arms. "Say not a word. Watch and listen."

Flaydilla was now seated upon the floor, eagerly turning and scanning the heavy leaves of parchment, which were properly ornamented with pictures drawn in inks of various colours.

"There! I remember that!" she said, clapping

her tiny hand over a picture of the virgin and child. "And that, and this, and this!"

Lady Lottie now began to sing a soft and gentle lullaby, and as the child caught the air, she turned quickly from the volume, and cried:

"Oh, my mamma used to sing that to me!"

"My darling, Albert, Albert, it is our stolen baby-girl! It is our little Daisie Blossom!" exclaimed Lady Lottie, as she caught up the little girl in a wild embrace of hysteric delight.

"Daisie Blossom! That was my name. Daisie Blossom!" said Flaydilla. "Are you my mamma?"

"Oh, heaven grant it to be thus, my child, Daisie; little darling Daisie Blossom, where have you been so long?"

The baron and baroness covered the fair child with kisses, and at that moment, the first beams of the rising sun began to dispel the dark clouds of night.

"Daylight dawns, dear wife," said the baron, kneeling, and raising his eyes to heaven. "Thank heaven the sun now rising will not be brighter nor warmer than our joy. It is day-dawn at Tempest House at last!"

Day-dawn at Tempest House, but how is it in De Montfort Palace with Roger Vagran?

CHAPTER XXIX

The rage and chagrin of the false Earl De Montfort had no bounds when he discovered that Sir Mortimer had escaped, and especially when he became convinced that it was Sir Mortimer to whom he had imparted the secret of Lauretta's birth, and that the knight was the slayer of Sir Simon.

His retainers were scattered in every direction, to search the premises of the palace, and failing there, to search the streets.

Roger Vagran, appalled by the events of the night, and the many perils which had so suddenly arisen to assail his good name, grieving for the death of his wife, and desiring the vengeance of the baron should he learn from Sir Mortimer the secret he had allowed to escape him, returned to his private apartment beset by a thousand fears.

He found Sir Barton delirious with fever, and incapable of advising or helping in any manner, while the sorceress, with all her firmness, seemed overwhelmed with terror.

"Woman," said Vagran, fiercely, "see to what end all your schemes are rushing! Ruin and infamy! Better to have remained plain Sir Roger as my merits made me, than to have climbed to this dizzy height, every step a crime, to be hurled headlong into infamy."

"Oh, yes!" croaked Siballa, sneeringly, and forgetting her fears in her rage, "it is all very well to blame me now. I told you when you put abroad the tale that the girl was drowned that it would be safer to put an end to her life then."

"Idiot! It was you who conceived and prompted the crime," interrupted Vagran. "I never dreamed of it until you put it into my brain."

"Of course not, poor innocent man! And I suppose I prompted you to ask me to steal the other child!"

"Simpleton! Of what avail the abduction of the elder child if we permitted the younger to live to inherit! Besides, I hated Albert Tempest; and more, I hated his proud wife, who, when I proffered my suit for her hand, bade me begone for a cunning knave who had stolen into a gentleman's shoes."

"Ho! then why did you not strangle the chit, that little Flay, when you had her? I told you to destroy the imp."

"I wish I had, I wish I had!" exclaimed Vagran. "And did you not say that she is now under the care of this Sir Mortimer's mother?"

"Ay, under the care of Mabel, Countess De Montfort."

"Pah! I fear nothing from her claims, for though she may be Mabel St. Orme, she has no proof that she was ever the wife of Earl Henry. At least there I am safe, for with my own hands I destroyed every proof of the marriage of Ethelbert Clair and Mabel St. Orme. There was a casket missing when I searched her cottage after we cast her into the river, and no doubt that casket contained some of the jewels Earl Henry had given her, and perhaps some letters—for I know he wrote such—yet all the proofs of the marriage I found and destroyed. So, though this woman of whom you speak, may by a miracle be Mabel St. Orme, and this Sir Mortimer be the son of her and Earl Henry, there exists no proof of the past, not one."

"Nicholas Flame?"

"A fig for his evidence. If I meet him again I'll hand him over to the hangman for a thief. Indeed, I remember now that he was outlawed by a decree of the late king, and the ban is still over him. I fear Sir Albert Tempest, for he will readily conceive how we have played upon him—"

"There exists no evidence that Lauretta Mansfield is his daughter," interrupted Siballa.

"That I know; yet Sir Albert will believe the story which Sir Mortimer will tell, and who knows what may be discovered in the stir which he will make. Nothing remains except to deny everything, and fortunately I have the king upon my side."

"What, deny and do nothing!" cried Siballa. "Co-ward, to work. Send Bertoll—go with him yourself—I will go to—the house of this Mabel St. Orme—I tell you it is she and no other. Capture her now, and the child, Flay, with her. You are powerful, why fear anything? You have begun, why stop? when to pause will or may be ruin. I saw the casket you missed. She has it. It may contain proofs of the marriage. You should have it. Then having her and the child in your power, make an end of both. Nor stop there, Roger Vagram, for like you I fear Sir Albert. Attack Tempest House—"

"What, without the consent of the king! You rave! Mother, you rave!"

"What is to prevent your easy getting of the king's consent, nay his order? King Richard does not like Sir Albert; that you know. Persuade the king that you know of certain papers concealed in Tempest House—we are aware, you and I, that there were treasonable papers brought from Henry Tudor by this sly Sir Mortimer—how they escaped the search vexes me—persuade the suspicious king that you are sure those papers and letters are hidden in Tempest House, and obtain his order to search the house."

"What then?"

"How dull you have grown, Roger Vagram! Why how easy it will be for you or your retainers, or Bertoll, under the plea of Sir Albert's arrest, to search, pick a quarrel, force an affray upon the angry baron, and make an end to him, eye, of Lady Lottie too, for that matter. Then make it appear that you tried to save the lives of the pair. All will be well then, and the girl Lauretta will be nobody."

"Now that Simon is dead I care nothing for the girl. You advise boldly—"

"Yes, and you must act promptly, Roger Vagram. Hasten at once to the king to obtain the order. Lose no time, my son."

"And you?"

"Leave Mabel St. Orme to me—"

"You seem to have some great influence with the king—why not go with me to him, and aid me in obtaining the order to search Tempest House and arrest all we may find there? I have a belief that this Sir Mortimer may seek refuge there with the girl."

"And why there?"

"Fool!—as—as," exclaimed Vagram, angrily, "I told him that Lauretta was the lost daughter of the baron—while I thought Sir Mortimer to be Sir Barton."

"So, so," mused the wily sorceress alone, "then doubtless all are there now or soon will be. All, Roger Vagram—the baron, the baroness, and Lauretta with—Sir Mortimer, and Mabel St. Orme with—little Flay—say, and the knaves, Nicholas Flame and Andrew Tarl. We will snare them all with one sweep. I dare not go with you into the presence of the king, for he bade me never let him see my face again, but get you to him by sunrise, and you will readily obtain the desired order. Then return hither and select a score or more of your roughest men—Bertoll and others like him, and with them make an end of these we fear. It is a pity Sir Barton is wounded."

"It is, for he is worth five common men," said Vagram, with a vexed look towards Sir Barton, who lay tossing restlessly on the couch. "He is too delirious to understand anything and too weak to assist. Well, since Simon is no more, I do not know but that Sir Barton may as well be left to die, for he had learned more than he should, and had begun to be insolently inquisitive concerning the walled-up room. In the end we must have bribed or removed him—"

"Say killed him, and there's an end of it," interrupted the merciless sorceress, with a glance of hate at the knight. "True, he might have aided us in what we have to do just now, but after that we would have nothing to do with him except to silence him. He has ever treated me with contempt, and if he does not die now, I will see to it hereafter. Get you gone to the king's palace, Roger. I will be here when you return."

The false earl saw that his mother's advice was the safest to act upon, and soon after left the palace, riding one of his fleetest horses.

Siballa Thornbuck, being left alone, and having satisfied herself that she was alone, took from the capacious pocket in her girdle several phials, from which she carefully selected one and emptied it into a goblet.

The goblet she filled with wine, and advancing to the groaning knight, muttered:

"When he has swallowed this there is no leech in all England can wake him, nor yet tell why he

died. Here, Sir Barton," she added, aloud, and in the soothing tone of a tender nurse, "drink this. It will do you good."

The delicious knight glared at her wildly, but refused the wine.

"I will place it here within his reach," muttered Siballa, putting the poisoned chalice upon a table. "He will drink it ere long. Or had I not best force it down his throat?"

She paused in doubt for a moment, but fearing that the knight might be too strong to overpower in his delirium, and still more that he might cry out, and so fill the room with prying spectators and suspicious questions, she turned away, thinking:

"He will drink it. His lips are parched with fever, I see. He will drink it."

Soon after, she left the room, and stealing from the palace, directed her steps towards that quarter of the town in which was situated Holly Cottage, the residence of Sir Mortimer's mother.

A few minutes after her departure from the room, Sir Barton arose from the couch, took up the goblet and deliberately cast its contents from the window, saying:

"Accursed woman! It is well for Barton Woolfort that he was not unconscious, as you and the earl supposed. The earl, indeed! Did he not call her mother, and she call him son? What mystery is this? I have long puzzled my brain over the strange intimacy existing between a peer of England and an infamous sorceress. So, they are mother and son! And Barton Woolfort is to be left to die, or, if he should live is to be put to death. By all the good that ever was in me, I may die from my wounds, but if I have enough life left, I will do one good deed ere I die; I will hasten to Tempest House and warn the baron of the intended scheme for his slaughter. So the wolf's whelp, Sir Simon, is no more. How came that about? No matter; I am weary of drawing sword in his quarrels."

Sir Barton hurried to his own apartment, and, strengthened by fever and hate against Roger Vagram, hastily put on a walking dress, and then left the palace unperceived.

(To be continued.)

STORY OF THE HEART.

CHAPTER II.

"Ah!" mused Belmont, gazing reflectively at the ceiling, "the old sea-dog is angry, and shows his teeth. He can bite, too. His words were meant for me. That's the disadvantage of having a bad character. He knows me too well; but with all his knowledge, he does not know that charming little episode in my life in which Crecentia figured so conspicuously. My sudden appearance was too much for her. She is in my power—yet I hesitate in this affair. Of all my scrapes this will be the worst—for the old man has been like a father to me. If it were anyone else, I might let her alone; but Crecentia, my peerless one! the only woman I ever cared a straw for! really, I cannot refrain; it would be asking too much of me. I think I will stand the risk of the shooting."

He got up and arranged his hair and cravat at the glass. He took a careful view of his personal exterior with great satisfaction.

"I'm a good-looking fellow!" he exclaimed. "There is no denying it. Few women can resist me. She loved me once—is that passion dead within her heart? I think not. However, I will soon put it to the test."

A summons to dinner put an end to his meditations. He found Crecentia looking composed and tranquil, and Marcus Winsor had recovered his usual stately and sedate bearing. Few men possessed the art of pleasing more thoroughly than Selden Belmont, and whatever failings or vices the man might have had under other associations, in polite circles he bore himself with gentlemanly ease and propriety. His manner towards Crecentia was marked by the most respectful deference, and even the grim commander was satisfied. He was the life and soul of the party, and his lively flashes of wit, and inexhaustible flow of small talk, from the latest fashion of a lady's dress, to the prevailing topic of political excitement, were highly entertaining. He was very fond of embellishing his conversation with scraps of poetry, and appeared familiar with the writings of every poet of note that ever existed. Whether this was studied for effect, or was the natural bent of his mind, it would be difficult to determine. At all events, his deep, melodious voice gave an additional charm to these gems of thought.

The dinner passed off very pleasantly. The commander retired to take a nap—his "custom of an afternoon"—and then Belmont understood why Crecentia had appointed that time for an interview. But why in the garden, where they might be overlooked?

Perhaps she feared some listening servant might catch the dread secret that lay between them? He lighted a cigar, and strolled leisurely into the garden.

The house was built upon high land, and the well-arranged grounds commanded a fine view of the ocean. The commander loved to gaze upon that element on which the better part of his life had been passed. Belmont sat down on an iron garden bench beneath the spreading branches of a lordly elm. This man had a fine appreciation of the beautiful.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, as he lazily puffed away at his cigar, "the old boy is well quartered here. He knows how to enjoy life. A paradise for a home, and an angel for his companion. And I am the serpent who is about to destroy this Eden. What a pity it is that I am such a scoundrel! but I can't help it—it is a constitutional weakness."

Crecentia, with a white, filmy shawl thrown over her head and shoulders, glided down the path and stood before him—her face as white as the shawl she wore, but looking so exquisitely lovely that the heart of this *blase* man throbbed with an emotion no other woman had ever been able to call forth. This very passion was Crecentia's worst peril. Could he cease to love her, he might withdraw the shadow of his presence, and leave her to happiness and peace.

"Sit down," he said, gently, as he threw away his cigar, and made room for her beside him. "I have much to say to you."

She complied with his request reluctantly, but her trembling limbs refused to sustain her, and she was forced to sink into the seat.

"How lovely you are, Crecentia," he exclaimed, with admiration.

She put up her hand deprecatingly.

"Do not call me by that name," she said. "Indeed you must not. Remember I am Mrs. Marcus Winsor, now."

"And am I not almost Marcus Winsor's son?" he urged. "Did he not rear us two poor orphans? Are we not like brother and sister?"

"Oh, yes," she cried, quickly—"let us be brother and sister. Forget the past and accept from me a sister's love."

"Impossible, Crecentia," he answered. "The love I entertain for you is not a brother's love. I did not realise how much I loved you until my vessel bore me far away. The thoughts of that sweet face have cheered me through many weary hours on the pathless ocean and in distant lands. Oh! how I longed for the hour of return; and when the brave ship careered on her homeward path, every wave that broke around her bows, foam-crested, seemed to bear upon its glassy surface the name of her I loved."

"How can I believe in a love that sought to destroy me?" questioned Crecentia, quickly.

"It was the very fervour of my passion that made me rash," he responded, readily. "Love excuses all things."

"No, not all," she answered, proudly. "There are insults a woman never forgets, never forgives. It may be wrong in me to argue with you, but we must come to an understanding at once. How can I believe in this love you profess, and which I do not credit, for your whole acquaintance with me has been a deception?"

"True enough," he answered, carelessly. "I have been rather fond of sailing under false colours in my time."

"You were introduced to me as Clarence Vincent, disguising your true name, which I have learned for the first time to-day; a proof that you had some sinister design in seeking my acquaintance. You found me a young and inexperienced school-girl, ignorant of the deceptions and wickedness of the world, full of romantic follies, and looking for the ideal lover that every maiden pictures in her mind. You more than realised that ideal, and my girlish heart was lost at our first meeting. You have praised my poor face often enough, but I can lay no claim to beauty such as yours. Selden Belmont, you then appeared to me the king of men, and though I have mingled more in the world since, I have never seen your equal in manly beauty."

"Really, Crecentia, you flatter me," exclaimed Belmont, surprised and pleased at this admission.

"Hear me to the end," she returned, coldly. "Perhaps you will not feel so flattered when I have done. You said you loved me, and I believed you. Why should I not? I did not know then how easy it is for some men to speak falsely. Oh! spare me farther protestations," she continued vehemently. "I will listen to you when I am done. We were betrothed, and I consented to secrecy, as the romance of the affair pleased me. Business, you said, called you to London, but I must correspond with you. I did so. I wrote you a number of silly letters—as young girls will do. I used every term of endearment; nay, I even went so far on several occasions as to address you as 'Dear husband.' In anticipation, I already saw myself your wife, and the fancy pleased me.

This correspondence lasted two weeks, and then you wrote to me to come to London, that you would meet me at the station, and we should be married. I was mad enough to comply with this request, for I was but a girl of seventeen, and I trusted you implicitly. I made my hasty preparations, without confiding even in my schoolfellow, stole out of the seminary, and took the afternoon train for London. That very day I had received my quarterly allowance from my guardian. The possession of that money was my salvation. You met me as you had agreed, and took me to the hotel. You conducted me to a room you had engaged for me, and left me to seek a minister, you said. While you were absent, the chambermaid came in to arrange the room. She was a pleasant middle-aged woman, and engaged in conversation with me. She congratulated me upon having such a good-looking man for a husband, and when I explained to her that I was not yet married, she seemed surprised, and questioned me closely. Something in the woman's face inspired me with confidence, and I told her all. Her indignation was boundless, and she denounced you as a villain. I would not, could not believe her, so great was my trust in you. She bade me wait until she went to the office and made inquiries. She soon returned, and told me it was as she suspected; you had registered our names as Clarence Vincent and lady, giving the clerk to understand that I was your wife. Then did I realise the fearful peril from which I had escaped. Though the woman assured me the landlord would protect me from all harm, I was frantic to return to the seminary, which I had left so foolishly. The good woman said it was my wisest plan, and told me I had just time to take the train for Worcester. She led me out by a side door, and I hurried to the station, purchased my ticket, and got in the train, but not until it had started did I feel safe.

"Ah!" exclaimed Belmont, who had listened attentively to all this, drawing a long breath, "that was the way you gave me the slip, was it?"

"On my arrival at the seminary," continued Crecentia, "I found I had been misled, and anxious inquiries were being made for me; but I explained my absence by saying that I had visited a friend, and had been detained. For weeks I trembled lest this adventure should reach my guardian's ears, but none ever suspected what had really occurred."

"Crecentia," exclaimed Belmont, suddenly, "if you had remained with me, I should really have married you."

Crecentia's face flushed indignantly.

"Selden Belmont," she said, "you know that is not the truth. Let us speak no more of the past. That day destroyed all the love I ever entertained for you—do not think that you can ever fan the dead ashes into life and warmth again. I am the wife of a good and honourable man, whom I respect too highly to ever wrong even by one sinful thought. The only shadow of my life has been the reflection that this Clarence Vincent might one day appear, and mar our happiness with the revelation of this folly of my youth. I never dreamed that he would appear in the person of my husband's adopted son—it has unnerved me beyond myself, for I am neither weak nor timid. I never fainted until to-day in all my life. Yet why should I torment myself? Marcus Winsor has been all to you that a father can be. You surely are not heartless enough to destroy this good man's peace? Give me those foolish letters, if you have them, and take a sister's gratitude in lieu of love."

Selden Belmont smiled disdainfully.

"I came here for you, Crecentia," he answered, "and I think you will find it difficult to escape me this time. I have the letters, elegant epistles, written upon gilt-edged note paper, with the dainty perfume, so redolent of love, still clinging to them. Half-a-dozen of them—here they are."

He drew them from the breast-pocket of his frock-coat, and held them up triumphantly. She extended her arm to take them, but he quietly put back her hand.

"Not yet, Crecentia," he cried, tauntingly. "You must earn them first. You are in more peril now than ever you were before. Unfortunately for you, Mr. Marcus Winsor has a very poor opinion of my moral character. When I show him these letters, spiced with such endearing epithets, and breathing the whole essence of love, double distilled; when I tell him that you came to London, alone, to meet me, what will he think?"

She wrung her hands bitterly together, and her breath came hard and dry.

"Oh! but you will not tell him that?" she cried. "It would be unmanly, base, cowardly!"

"All things are fair in love," he answered, coolly. "Crecentia you must be mine—I cannot relinquish you. It remains with you to decide—I will give you plenty of time for reflection. I shall remain here a week; at the end of that time you must fly with me, or I shall reveal the whole to Marcus Winsor."

She sprang to her feet with flashing eyes, though her cheeks were deathly pale. She seemed to have gained strength from the very extremity of her peril. "Selden Belmont," she exclaimed, "I will kill myself sooner than yield to you."

She turned haughtily away and returned to the house. He gazed after her musingly.

"Kill herself!" he muttered. "Ah! yes, the women always say that. I may be driving her too far, some natures will sooner break than bend. What fools these women are! If she were to tell her husband all, he would believe her, take her to his heart—and kick me out of the house."

It was hard for Crecentia to play the hypocrite; to meet this man with a smiling face for whom she entertained such feelings of fear and abhorrence. She could see no outlet to the peril which surrounded her. She was hemmed in, as it were, by a circle of fire, from which there was no escape. It appeared to her that Marcus Winsor would utterly repudiate her, should he hear of her girlish folly; and she was so proud of this grand old man, who had raised her to a station beyond the wildest dream of her imagination. It never occurred to her that the simplest way out of her difficulty would be to tell her husband all, and claim his protection. Oh! no; she never could have ventured to do that. And then those foolish letters, those evidences of her girlish folly, if she could but obtain them, if she could but destroy them, she might laugh at Belmont, for he could never prove that she had met him in London, if she denied it; but the letters signed in full "Crecentia Ennis"—there was no denying them.

These restless thoughts rendered sleep that night impossible. Wakeful, and strangely sensitive to every sound, she counted the tedious hours as the church bell proclaimed their passage. The hour of one had sounded, and still her efforts to woo sleep to her eyelids proved futile. Suddenly the room seemed full of smoke, and a strong savour of burning cloth was in the air. She arose hastily from her couch and threw a loose wrapper around her, and then hurried into the passage. It was full of smoke, and the smell of something burning became much stronger. As she had said herself, she was not of a timid nature. She did not stop to awaken Mr. Winsor, but hastened forward to ascertain from whence the smoke came. There could not be much fire as yet, as she heard no sound of crackling flames.

Her quest led her to the door of the spare chamber, the one that had been assigned to Selden Belmont. The door was ajar, and a heavy, stifling smoke was slowly oozing forth. She pushed the door open and entered. A single glance disclosed the situation. Belmont had fallen asleep while reading by the lamp placed on a small table near the head of the bed, and the wind had blown the heavy curtains against the flame of the lamp, igniting them, and they were smouldering and sending forth a dense smoke. Belmont was unconscious and nearly suffocated. Had she been five minutes later she would have found him dead.

Here was a way out of her peril. She had but to return to her chamber and leave this man to his fate, and the fire which was rapidly spreading, would soon destroy the only being upon the earth who had the power to injure her. Why should she not do so? What mercy did this man deserve at her hands? A heartless villain, who had dared, with easy effrontery, to insult her by the most dishonourable proposals. An ungrateful man, who would inflict upon his benefactor, the best friend he had in the world, the worst injury that one man can inflict upon another. Such a man was not fit to live, and who would have blamed Crecentia if she had left him there to perish? Yet, strangely enough, her first instinct was to save him.

She caught up the water-pitcher and dashed its contents upon the burning curtains. She then tore them down and cast them through the open window into the garden, scorching and blackening her delicate hands in the act. Then she hurried back to her own chamber, aroused her husband, and briefly told him what had occurred. Taking her cologne-bottle and some strong salts, she returned to Belmont's assistance.

Marcus Winsor dressed himself hurriedly to go for a physician if it should be necessary. Crecentia found Belmont still insensible, but his laboured breathing showed that he still lived. It had been a narrow escape for him—the suffocating smoke had nearly done its deadly work. She applied the salts to his nostrils and bathed his forehead with the fragrant cologne. Marcus Winsor was impressed with the similarity of the situation to that of their (to him) first meeting, as he came into the room, only the characters were reversed; it was now Crecentia who ministered to Selden Belmont.

"Why, Crecentia," he exclaimed, "this is strange. Well, one good turn deserves another. How is he now?"

"Much better," she answered.

"No occasion to go for the doctor, eh?"

"Not the slightest. Consciousness is rapidly returning."

"What carelessness, to read himself to sleep, and leave his lamp burning. It is lucky you smelt the smoke, or it would have been all over with him. He always was reckless. It will cost him his life one of these days, I am afraid."

"I hope not," cried Crecentia, involuntarily. "He is almost too perfect a man to die."

"In form and feature he may be; but like the glassy surface of a summer sea, his fair exterior hides the monsters that lay in the depths of his mind. You can scarcely realise, my dear, how utterly devoid of principle this young man is."

Crecentia shuddered; she realised it full well. She thought she knew the monsters of his mind better than her husband did.

Belmont heaved a deep sigh, and his senses seemed struggling back again. Crecentia wondered if the narrow escape he had had from death would have any effect upon his disposition. She watched him curiously as his eyes unfolded. He gazed vaguely about him, with a wild, bewildered stare. The peril he had passed through had been a blank to him—he did not know what had happened. He saw Marcus Winsor and Crecentia, her white wrapper smirched with black stains, standing by the bedside, and he perceived the strong effluvia of burnt cloth.

"Why, what is all this?" he exclaimed, in great surprise. "Is the house on fire?"

"Something very much like it," laughed Winsor. "Your bad habit of reading at night has been very near proving fatal to you, and burning us all out of house and home."

He then explained what had happened. Crecentia had always thought Belmont's eyes the most expressive she ever saw, and to her dying day she never forgot the glance he cast upon her, when her husband's narration was finished. One slight regret arose in her mind—the first and last—if Belmont had only dealt honourably with her when they first met, what a love might have been hers—how amply she could have repaid it.

"So Crecentia saved my life?" he asked, musingly. "Gratitude is not one of my feelings—but, really, I think I must do something here."

Marcus Winsor laughed; he did not see what Belmont could do, and imagined that he would forget all about it in a month; but Crecentia shed tears of joy. She understood from those words that her peril was over.

The next day Selden Belmont returned Crecentia's letters to her.

"I will not promise to be a better man," he said, "but I will try to be."

The letters were destroyed, and the cloud passed away from Crecentia's life. At the expiration of his leave, Belmont rejoined his vessel. The first intelligence they received of him after he left was that he was dead. He had been mortally wounded in a boat attack in one of the African rivers. His last word was "Crecentia."

"What did he mean by that?" asked Marcus Winsor, as he read the letter containing the intelligence.

Crecentia knew but too well. In all the world she was the only one who dropped a tear to Selden Belmont's memory.

G. L. A.

SIX WIVES.—A Nottingham paper says: "There is now living, not a hundred miles from Sheffield, a man, the real facts of whose history we propose to give. At the age of 25 he was engaged and about to be married to a woman of the name of Walker, but she was taken away by death. Having followed her to the grave and mourned for her some time, he at last became acquainted with and married to a woman named Voce. After a few years she died. His next wife was a widow named Vickerstaff. After a few years she also died. He next married Vickerstaff, the sister of his last wife's husband. In a few weeks she died. Feeling almost discouraged by past experience, he waited awhile, but being lonely he again entered into matrimony, with a woman named Webster. After having enjoyed each other's company for several years, she was also taken away by death. The issue of the above marriages are three children, one by the first wife and two by the last. It is a remarkable fact that all the deaths were from decline. The widower then commenced a courtship with a woman named Holland, whose husband had emigrated, and nothing having been heard of him for a number of years, and thinking he was dead, they at length became man and wife. They lived together in perfect harmony for two years, when, to their great consternation, her former husband after the lapse of seventeen years, returned and claimed her as his lawful wife. They are now living together. So we see that this man has had as good as five wives stolen away by death, and the sixth by a living man."



[A SAD PROSPECT.]

AMY'S GIFTS.

ALL day long a fierce east wind had moaned through the forests, rattling the blinds, rioting in chimney tops, and whirling great eddying drifts of dead sycamore leaves down the lonesome lanes.

A heavy bank of dull, leaden clouds was slowly rising in the south-west, and the chill, frosty air clearly betokened snow. Amy Landon, sitting at her work, glanced uneasily at the threatening sky, and the clever little fingers flew faster than ever.

She had a good two miles to go with her work, when it was completed. Were it not that two little hearts beat high with the hope that their birthday would not be forgotten, she would have given up all idea of going that night.

The little clock on the mantel-piece struck four as Amy folded up the last garment and packed it smoothly among the rest.

Then tying on her little scarlet hood, she prepared for her long, tedious walk. She made a pretty picture, with her bright eyes, crimson lips, and short curls peeping from under her dainty hood. You would have hardly thought, to look at her bright face, that only those weak, slender fingers interposed between her and that terrible wolf lurking at her very door.

Amy Landon had a very hopeful temperament, and now, she said to herself, resolutely, that she had no business to be sad; and so she put resolutely away from her all doubts and fears for the future.

Half-way down the hill she paused to kiss her fingers to the two eager, expectant little faces pressed closely against the window-pane, and smiled softly to herself as she fancied she felt the soft kisses which she knew were left on the frosty glass. Nestled down under the lee of the hill was an old, quaint, weather-beaten smithy. In the summer it looked so black and smutty, outlined against the soft, tender green of the sloping banks, and the slender belt of

pale golden willows, that one thought involuntarily it was a pity so fair a picture should be marred by this rude "charcoal sketch." But to-day it looked cosy and cheerful, with its glowing fires and clouds of black, billowy smoke. It gave warmth and colour to the picture, and brightened up the lonesome road and gray, faded fields. At least so thought Amy Landon as she cast a shy glance in at the great, wide-open doors, and a slow red came into her face as she hurried by. Why it should, though, is more than I can tell. She could have seen nobody but Robert Hunt, the lithe-limbed, broad-shouldered blacksmith. He was a noble specimen of manhood, however, despite his smutty face and leathern apron. He was one of those broad-chested, muscular men, who are the especial admiration of all little, delicate, will-o'-the-wisp women. Now Robert Hunt could not remember the time when Amy Landon had not been a beautiful inspiration to him. Somewhere in that great, strong heart of his was a secret chamber, where she sat enshrined, a pure, unapproachable saint.

He had never dared to so much as touch her fingertips, and as for taking her in his arms and telling her he loved her—why! he would as soon have thought of reaching up to the stars. She was to him a dainty bit of human porcelain, and he had a vague sort of an idea that one of his brawny hands would crush her to atoms.

She was none the less Judge Landon's daughter, he reasoned, now that he was dead, and his beloved and petted children were left homeless and destitute; but somehow, despite all his reasonings, some sweet, bewildering fancies would creep into his brain, and sometimes he saw rare pictures in the glowing embers, as he wrought at his homely tasks—pictures of the old lonely house on the hill made glad and gay once more, of roses blooming over the neglected porch, and always a lithe, dainty little figure, with wild, jetty curls, and proud, crimson lips. Perhaps

some such fancies had unaccountably got into Amy's brain—at anyrate something beguiled the weariness of the way, for ere she was half aware of it, she was at her destination.

The bundle of work was delivered up to the clerk, an entry made in a huge ledger, the money counted out, and another package laid out, before she had half time to warm her fingers at the glowing coal fire that gave such a summery feeling to the spacious room, with its lofty ceiling and plate-glass windows. But Amy knew she must not linger in the grateful warmth. The short winter twilight was rapidly merging into night, and the lamps were beginning to appear here and there in the shop windows. She looked at her money; she had one pound. She ran over in her mind, as she stood drawing on her gloves, and noting how shabby they were getting, how much the money must buy.

She thought—for just a minute—if she could only have some nice, new, warm ones—she needed them so much; but no—there was the bright worsted scarf that Edie had coveted so long, and the ball and knife for Frank. No, it was very certain she could get nothing for herself. For a moment a homesick feeling came over her as she thought that in all the world there was no one to make her a present.

It was rapidly growing dusk as she emerged from the shop. First of all she must get something for to-morrow's dinner. The crowds gathered about the markets, and, with a half-frightened step, she pushed her way into the first one she came to. Ah! how tempting looked the counter with its round, plump geese. Then there were nice, fresh sides of pork, tender-looking beef, and all manner of possible and impossible vegetables. Only one pound! Amy knew that she could never aspire to chickens, and so, carefully selecting a nice bit of pork, and a few vegetables, she ordered them to be done up, and mentally calculated their cost as she prepared to pay for them. She withdrew her hand from her pocket, and a quick, frightened look came over her face. Her purse was gone! What should she do! She carefully searched her pocket; there was nothing in it but her handkerchief. In the crowd somebody had picked her pocket.

She gave back her purchases and went out into the gloom of the approaching night. Alas! how very dark everything looked to her now. Two weeks' labour lost, and nothing to live on for the next two.

And then Edie and Frankie! How well she remembered the little eager faces against the pane, as she came down the hill. How could she bear to see their disappointment. Amy had a very brave heart, but she gave way now, as with trembling steps she turned her feet homewards. It was quite dark, too, and the storm that had threatened all day began to descend in fine, icy particles, and the cutting east wind blew them sharply against her face. She could hardly stand sometimes, when a sudden gust swept round the corners. It seemed to her as if she could never reach home in this fierce storm; and then her heart was so heavy!

Suddenly, as she came round a bend in the road, the wind lulled a little, and she looked anxiously through the storm and darkness, when, sharply outlined against the dusky eastern sky, a crimson jet of flame shot suddenly up, and lighted the gloom with a wild, and unearthly glare. She was now within half-a-mile of home, and the flames threw a dull lurid light over the fields and woods. She stopped, shading her eyes from the blinding storm that increased every moment in fury. Suddenly she started forward with a wild, pitiful wail—it was her own home that was in flames! Edie and Frank! Oh, heaven! she thought for a moment she should go mad. Oh, how contemptible seemed her grief of an hour before. What was a paltry pound, when weighed in the balance with those two priceless lives! Oh, the dear, dear faces against the pane! Fear lent new fleetness to her steps, and despite the wind that nearly lifted her from her feet, she gained the street, just as the roof and timbers fell in, with a sharp, ringing crash. There was already a crowd gathered, but it was too late to save the building when the alarm was given.

Robert Hunt, standing with folded arms, and white stern lips, was suddenly startled by a pained, frightened face, out of which every vestige of colour had faded, which seemed to glide like a spirit out of the storm and blackness of the night. Her lips moved, but she could not articulate; he saw the terrible fear in her face, and said hurriedly:

"They are both safe. I carried them in my arms to the house, and Mrs. Dean, my housekeeper, will do everything to make them comfortable."

Amy heard only one sentence, "they are safe." She felt a deadly faintness stealing over her; she knew Robert was still speaking, but a ringing sound was in her ears. She tried to move, but her limbs were rigid, and her tongue seemed like a lump of lead in her mouth, and then the red gleam of fire

faded suddenly out, and for the first time in her life, Amy Lander fainted.

For one terrible moment Robert Hunt thought she was dead; she lay in his arms so pale and motionless. He felt a fierce sort of pleasure that he could hold her so in death, if not in life.

"Clear the way," he called out, sharply. "Don't you see she is dead?"

"No, no, man, not dead; she has only fainted—and no wonder, poor child!" said a kind-hearted neighbour, as he looked at the pale face lying against the broad breast of the young blacksmith. "Better take her to your house, Hunt; the children will do her the most good, when she recovers."

"Strange," he went on, musingly, "how much one of these little, slender, delicate women will go through. It isn't every man that could walk from C— such a wild night as this."

Good little Mrs. Dean was somewhat startled when Robert strode hastily in and deposited his senseless burden on the sofa. A few words sufficed to explain it, however, and she was soon busy with restoratives. It was a long, deadly faint, but she opened her eyes at last, to find Edie and Frank raining passionate kisses on her cheeks and lips. At first she was bewildered, but slowly it all came back—the lost money, the terrible storm, the lurid flames, the deadly fear, and last of all the happy relief. And she owed it all to him; his strong arm had saved them all; and as she looked around the room her eye caught first one and then another familiar object, which she knew he must have risked his life to save, and she broke into a passionate flood of weeping.

Robert standing in the shadow, saw the look, and the fast-falling tears. But he entirely misinterpreted them. He was proud—and his quick thought was, "She scorns the life that I have saved, because I did it. She is humbled and pained to find herself here in my house. I must say something to relieve her." And he looked about him in perplexity.

He was certain he should make a blunder, but something must be done, he thought; so with a stern set face he walked up to the little sobbing figure, and stammered out:

"Perhaps you are sorry I brought you here, Miss Lander. If there be anywhere else you had rather go—"

She looked up at him with startled eyes—she had been so content to be there. "But, Robert, I have nowhere else to go, and oh, I am so tired!"

"Oh, Amy, if I could only relieve you! If I could only carry your burdens! Do you think you could ever learn to love me?"

He stopped suddenly, shocked at his own temerity. He had expected to make a blunder—but such a blunder! It was the very last thing in the world he had intended to say—what could have possessed him?

Amy, however, did not seem at all shocked, and the little hand fluttered softly into his as she said, "I have always loved you, Robert."

Mrs. Dean, coming back from putting the children to bed, paused astonished, on the threshold, at the unexpected *talk* that met her eye. Being a woman, however, she very quickly divined the true state of affairs, stepped softly back, and, strange to relate, was not missed, though she was gone nearly an hour!

So many startling events had crowded upon each other that Amy had completely forgotten the lost purse. She remembered it now, however, sitting in the glow of the bright wood fire, and related it slowly as if it were some terrible dream.

"You can never imagine," she said, shudderingly, "the utter desolation and despair with which I turned my face out into the storm and darkness, for I did not know, then, Robert, of the rich gift of your love," she added, softly. "I think it must have been in the crowd at the market door that the theft was committed. I wonder he did not take my handkerchief also," she added, drawing it slowly forth as she spoke.

Something fell out of the folds and rolled at her feet, where it burned and glowed like living fire. Robert sprang quickly to his feet and picked it up. Amy was at his side, flushed and excited.

"Where could it have come from, Robert?" she cried, breathlessly.

"The gentleman who picked your pocket evidently lost by the business," he said, smiling at her eagerness. "It is worth a hundred pounds, probably."

Amy took it, and turned it slowly round. She knew something of diamonds—she used to wear them once, and she knew Robert was not mistaken in its value. It was a gentleman's ring, of massive gold, studded with a superb cluster of diamonds.

"Another gift, darling," he said, smiling down into the sweet, flushed face, lying on his shoulder. There were tears in the soft brown eyes.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"I was thinking," she said, softly, "what a very happy day this is," nestling still closer to the broad chest, that was to be henceforth and for evermore a faithful shield between her and sorrow.

Edie and Frank were as happy as kings, but when a little later Amy and Robert rode into C—, Amy said, coming into the room on her return, a warm blush mantling her soft cheek:

"We are to stay here always, now, children, and Robert is to be your brother."

Frank could contain himself no longer, but threw up his cap, declaring that this was "the jolliest birthday he had ever seen."

Edie was less demonstrative, but with a sudden quick motion she knelt before Robert's chair and kissed the strong brown hand lying on his knee.

Frank's delight knew no bounds.

"Oh Amy!" he exclaimed, "are you not glad the old house was burnt down? It is ever so much nicer here. And oh," he added enthusiastically, "there is such a splendid garret here!"

Amy tried to check him, but as he told Edie confidentially, a little while afterwards, "she didn't feel very vexed about it; he was sure she didn't look at all sorry."

R. B. C.

SOMETIMES SAPHIRE SOMETIMES PALE

BY J. R. LITTLEPAGE.

CHAPTER XVII.

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou spirit of health, or goblin damn'd,
Bring with thee airs from heaven, or blasts from hell;
Be thy advent wished or charitably
Thou comest in such a questionable shape!

Hamlet.

"What time alarmed you?" asked Earnshaw, looking at the beautiful heiress almost sternly.

"A voice—a laugh—somebody in my room," gasped Cathleen.

A second and intent glance at the pale cheeks of Cathleen, the large, dark eyes distended by fear, showed Percy Earnshaw that this was no coquettish feint; that Miss Lamotte was, in sober truth, suffering from an extremity of terror. Her white hands were still clasped tightly upon the young man's shoulder; there was a kind of pleading expression in her face, and also a sort of reliance upon him which touched the tender heart, and fired the passionate soul of the tutor, in spite of his proud and manly resolutions.

"I suppose Fantine has fallen asleep in her own room, and forgotten me," sobbed Cathleen, "everybody seems to be in bed, the house is so quiet. I must have Fantine with me all night. Will you come with me to call her? I dare not go back to my room and ring."

"But surely if anybody has dared to conceal himself in your room, I had better call up some of the men-servants," said Earnshaw.

"It is nobody whom they could have power to turn out," responded Miss Lamotte, with a shudder. "It is not anything earthly which is in my room, it is the voice I have heard once before; I never told you; it was Oscar Arkwright to whom I related that story. Mr. Earnshaw, do not call me superstitious. I hate that word which men use to pour contempt upon those who believe in something which they cannot either explain or understand; it is not because you cannot understand a thing that it is quite impossible."

She paused, and looked fearfully over her shoulder. "I will go with you to call Fantine," said Earnshaw, "and I shall venture to prescribe for you some sal-volatile, to quiet your nerves."

"You think I am ill, or at least, fanciful," said Cathleen, impetuously. "You smile so incredulously, Mr. Earnshaw. I tell you there is something—"

At this moment a door at the end of the passage opened; a sort of instinct impelled Cathleen to crouch down behind the pedestal upon which stood a black marble nymph, holding the lamp which lighted the corridor.

The person came, with a stately and measured tread, along the passage; he was a tall, old man, in a dressing-robe flowered with gold. The head of this personage was bald. As he approached the light of the lamp, Earnshaw perceived that he was nearly toothless.

Unconscious of the proximity of the bride whom he coveted, the Earl of Beechfield, for he it was who wore the flowered dressing-robe, paused when he perceived Earnshaw, and stared at him. The young man stood erect, and returned the scrutiny of the noble with a calm look, which was not tinged with insolence, albeit that it was free from the faintest shadow of servility.

There was something imposing and noble in the

bearing of Earnshaw. His closely-cut, yet waving dark hair allowed the classic mould of his head to be seen; pale, a little sad, his fine face impressed the earl as being one which he had seen before. The tutor was simply, even carelessly, dressed, yet as he stood there, under the lamp, his arm in a sling, unconscious to whom he was bowing, the Earl of Beechfield made him an obeisance.

Earnshaw returned the salute profoundly.

"I have not the pleasure of knowing your name," said Lord Beechfield, courteously. "A visitor of Mr. Lamotte's, I presume?"

"No, my lord," replied Earnshaw; "I am Master Albert Viner's tutor."

"Oh, indeed," said the nobleman; "are you going into the Church then?"

"No, my lord," replied Earnshaw. "I am not a tutor who purposes entering the Church, and so undertakes tuition in good families that he may secure patronage and preferment. I am not so fortunate. I am only a student from a German university."

"But you are English?" said Lord Beechfield.

"Yes, my lord, of English parentage," replied the young man.

"You must really excuse my rudeness," said Lord Beechfield, "but your likeness to a person I know is really so remarkable, that I am staggered; but these coincidences do occur, I suppose."

Earnshaw looked upon the ground, and his heart beat strongly against his side.

Cathleen in hiding behind the pedestal, he standing sentinel over her; a great English nobleman discoursing of his remarkable likeness to a person whom he had known; was he about, at last, to discover the mystery respecting his birth, which it had perplexed him to unravel, ever since he had arrived at the age of manhood?

"What was the name of the person, my lord, whom I so much resemble?" he asked, slowly.

"Oh! it cannot be of consequence to you," said the nobleman, with a disagreeable smile; "those chance likenesses are worth nothing."

"In this case, my lord, the name of the person whom I resemble, would, in all probability, be of an immense benefit to me," said Earnshaw, impetuously.

"I see, I see," cried the nobleman, breaking into an odious chuckle; "you are one of those gentlemen who do not know the name of their august and immediate ancestor? I pity you; I pity you; but I myself—you quite comprehend me?" Lord Beechfield made a peculiar gesture with his right arm. "I have myself, in youth—in youth, mind, been as gay a dog, so gay a dog, he he he!" and again the nobleman chuckled odiously, "that I comprehend any unfortunate old noblemen, or gentlemen, who may chance to have a fine, tall son appear before him, some fine morning, with all sorts of claims, demands, and reproaches. No, no, no. Let sleeping dogs lie, my friend, and seek not to disturb the equanimity of any peaceful and placid old gentleman. Good-night to you, sir."

There was a something quite sardonic in the look, tone, and words of the sinister old noble. He made a parting salute to the tutor, went down the passage, entered a door on the left, and closed it behind him. Cathleen came from behind her pedestal, and now it was her turn to be astonished. Earnshaw's very lips were white, his dark eyes blazed like live coals. It was a face expressive of intense, concentrated wrath; not the grave, calm, sweet countenance, at once manly and gentle, which had hitherto (in spite of her patrician pride) appeared to Cathleen as the ideal of a hero of the old chivalrous days. And yet there was a look almost sublime, mingled with the supreme scorn which filled Earnshaw's eyes; he was angry, but one felt that he had right on his side.

"Mr. Earnshaw," said Miss Lamotte, "do not let the insulting words of the Earl of Beechfield annoy you. Do you suppose anyone would think the less of you for those insinuations of his?"

"I care not, Miss Lamotte, what the world thinks of me. I know too well the estimation in which it holds those who work for their living, in positions of dependence. It speaks sometimes civilly to them, sometimes kindly, sometimes it is better pleased to insult them. I assure you that all modes of address are equally valued by me."

"How angry he is," thought Cathleen, "and how grand he seems and looks in his anger. Mr. Earnshaw, you are not vexed with me, are you?" asked Cathleen, with a vivid blush.

Her voice trembled and sank low as she spoke. She expected a warm, rapturous protestation. Instead, Earnshaw only looked at her sternly, and a faint, proud smile curled his lip.

"Angry, Miss Lamotte! You amaze me," he said. "Surely, the anger or approval of a man like myself ought to be of supreme indifference to Miss Lamotte of Dungarvon."

The words were full of a pungent sarcasm. Earnshaw, poisoned against Cathleen by Oscar, saw in the

downcast looks and changing colour of the heiress only the trickery of a merciless and finished coquette. Cathleen felt the bitterness, without understanding it. On her part she was pained, vexed, but not so angry as she was curious and astonished.

"Will you come with me, Mr. Earnshaw, to seek Fantine?" she said, hastily. "I will not trouble you again."

Earnshaw obeyed. He accompanied Miss Lamotte to that portion of the mansion where Fantine slept. He waited outside the door, while Cathleen ran, without knocking, into her maid's room. The young French girl had fallen asleep with her head on the table. Cathleen shook her arm.

"Rouse up, Fantine, rouse up; you must come and sleep in my room to-night."

"Ah!" cried the girl, rubbing her eyes, and looking about her fearfully. "Has mademoiselle again seen the ghost?"

"Hush!" said Cathleen, holding up her finger. "Mr. Earnshaw is outside; he came with me to seek you."

"Mon Dieu! he must search your room, mademoiselle," said Fantine; "it may be no ghost."

"Come," said Cathleen. "Put out that lamp; now follow me."

The little company proceeded to the room of Miss Lamotte. Earnshaw paused on the threshold.

"Am I to search?" he asked.

"No, no. I am well aware that nothing human was in my room to-night. Good-night, Mr. Earnshaw," and she extended her hand to the tutor.

"Good-night, Miss Lamotte," he scarcely touched her hand, and with a bow, he moved away.

Fantine took a light, and searched the splendid room from one end to another. She raised the silken valence of the bed; she went behind the satin curtains of the windows; she opened the door of the bath-room. Presently she returned to the side of Cathleen.

"The room is safe, mademoiselle," she said. "Shall I lock the door?"

"Yes," returned Miss Lamotte, absently.

It was singular, but true, that the proud heiress was thinking more of the stern, dark face of the tutor, than of the unearthly voice which had alarmed her; more of him, if the truth were told, than of the old, painted noble whom her grandfather intended her to marry.

Meanwhile, Earnshaw went on towards his own rooms; his heart on fire, his soul in a tumult.

"What had that odious old lord meant to insinuate? Probably he knew or had met with some nobleman, dissipated, heartless, wicked as himself, whom he had remembered suddenly when he saw Earnshaw. It was likely enough even, that Earnshaw was the son of this great man who had been the intimate of Lord Beechfield in past days. Then, if the son, he was, doubtless, the lawful son, and Lord Beechfield had it in his power to put Earnshaw upon the right track. Gollon must attack him," mused Earnshaw; "I must write to Gollon and tell him of the little episode of to-night," while he thought thus the memory of Cathleen, pale, frightened, clinging to him, came to him like a vision of Paradise; but he told himself that it was a false vision. "I must learn to distrust each look, tone, word of that Syren," he muttered.

Just as he was entering his room, a laugh smote upon his ear, precisely the odd unearthly laugh which Cathleen had heard in her chamber. Earnshaw raised the lamp high, with his free hand, gave a quick, piercing glance about him, and perceived the figure of a man disappearing round the corner of a long passage. He turned the corner and saw the same figure, half-hidden in shadow, ascending a narrow flight of stairs, which led, as he supposed, to the servants' offices. A second laugh, hollow, mocking, horrible in sound beyond expression, smote harshly upon his ear; he sprang lightly up the steps, swiftly, impetuously. Had his second hand been free, it seemed to him he must have grasped the coat tails of the wild scarecrow figure which flew before him. There was a long narrow passage at the head of the stairs, and Earnshaw saw the form now at the farther end. Suddenly the creature turned, crouched low, as might some animal sitting upon its haunches, and seemed to be awaiting the approach of Earnshaw.

The young man advanced steadily; he was alike free from superstitious or physical fear. In a moment more he would have seen the face of the being, when the figure suddenly rose, and so it seemed to Earnshaw, vanished through the wall. The young man came up still holding his lamp high, still looking eagerly about him. The portion of the mansion where he now found himself seemed uninhabited; the walls were rough and only stained of some dark reddish brown hue. Dungarvon Towers was a vast pile, and there was nothing remarkable in a large portion of the great house being given up to lumber rooms. There were doors low set in the walls; doors

which stood ajar, many of them. Earnshaw pushed one open, and entered a low-roofed chamber; the carvings of the door, the cornice, skirting-board, and the high mantelshelf were all of dark wood, fantastically carved. There was a damp, mouldy smell in this chamber; it was a fair-sized room, but perfectly empty of the least sign of habitation. Earnshaw entered several other rooms, all bare, all low-roofed, all with the same mouldy odour, but no trace of the man who had fled before him was visible.

Earnshaw was singularly free from a tincture, even a tincture of superstition; but yet it never entered his mind to suppose that the creature he had just seen was a housebreaker, or a common thief. He had his own secret thoughts upon the matter, and he returned, with a slow step, to his own apartments. There a bright fire burnt to give him welcome, some wine was simmering over a spirit-lamp, a glass goblet, some dried fruit, and slices of toast were placed upon his little table. Lastly, his nurse, with a clean mob cap on her respectable old head, was nodding in a low-backed chair. Earnshaw called her gently, the good soul started, awoke in a moment, and asked with some fear if he was "look worse."

"No, nurse," responded Earnshaw; "I was not able to sleep, and I dressed as well as I could, without calling you. I walked out in the passages to try and tire myself; and now will you help me off with this one sleeve of my coat? Thank you."

"I hope, sir, you have not disturbed the other arm?" asked the nurse.

"No, nurse, no, it has not been moved; but I feel a little weak, and I will drink some of that nice port which you have warmed over the spirit lamp."

"Aye, it's right good too," said the nurse, "it's some of the squire's primest. Miss Cathleen would insist on having a bottle of the very best for you, sir."

"She is too good," said Earnshaw, with a cold incredulous smile; "but now, nurse, if you please, will you take some of this good wine yourself, and while we sip it, let me ask you if you have ever heard that this old mansion was haunted?"

"Heaven save us," cried the old woman, "have you met the laughing man in the passages?"

"Who may he be?" asked Earnshaw, coolly. "Why, it's the ghost that walks of nights, or runs, and sits like a dog on its haunches; and it looks like a man in a shabby suit, and every now and then it laughs. I've met it myself, sir; but the squire, he has given it out that he will dismiss any servant who mentions it. Don't tell on me, sir."

"Certainly not," returned Earnshaw, stirring his wine, with a grave face.

"And have you met him, sir?" asked the nurse.

"My dear nurse," replied the young man, with a smile, "how can you ask me such a question? I have not an atom of faith in ghosts."

This answer satisfied the old lady, and soon afterwards Earnshaw retired to rest and slept soundly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Hope, jealousy, disdain, submission, grief, Anxiety, and love, in every shape; To these as different sentiments succeeded; As mixed emotions. Thompson.

The Earl of Beechfield was closetted the following morning for some time with Mr. Lamotte.

When, at last, he rode away upon a fine hunter, which the squire lent him, he turned his sly and painted face towards that portion of the mansion which was occupied by Cathleen; and presently he was rewarded by a sight of the tall, raven-haired beauty.

She stood at the window of her boudoir. She wore a long robe of rich blue, a most fascinating morning costume. She waved her white hand to him courteously.

Had the nobleman been nearer he might not have liked the bitter smile which accompanied the polite gesture; as it was, he saw it not. He kissed the fingers of his riding gloves. Away he rode, chuckling to himself:

"It is time that I had a wife at the head of my house," muttered the nobleman. "I may yet raise myself up an heir. That creature is beautiful enough to set a sane man wild. As it is, I have passed the time for such fevers and follies, but she will make such a countess as the London Court has not seen for ages, and her property equals mine. I shall be proud of her. If she be a shrew, as they tell me she is, I can tame her I hope."

Things went on smoothly at the Towers for a few days. Earnshaw's arm was soon well again. Master Albert came to him regularly for his lessons.

To the amaze of Cathleen, Master Viner conducted himself, while with his tutor, in the most exemplary manner, and even seemed to make some progress in the simple arts of writing, spelling, and reading; which elementary branches he had hitherto greatly

neglected. More than this, Master Viner expressed a decided liking for his tutor, who, he declared emphatically, was a "right sort of fellow." This liking on the part of her favourite won over that portion of Mrs. Lamotte's moral nature which we may call by courtesy, her heart.

Once or twice she entered the schoolroom, which was a large room in the left wing of the mansion, and languidly expressed her cool satisfaction at the progress dear Albert was making.

Miss Lamotte, meanwhile, was immensely puzzled, piqued, annoyed, at the cold and studied politeness of Earnshaw. All her smiles and witticisms failed (so it seemed to her) to draw forth one tender look, one unguarded word, from her cousin's tutor. This conduct set Cathleen thinking; from thinking she began to dream. She remembered the mysterious conversation between the earl and the tutor, the night when she had been crouching behind the pedestal. Her poetic fancy was not long in weaving a bright web of romance out of those few words. She remembered also that Mr. John Gollon, her grandfather's lawyer, had adopted and educated Earnshaw, and she told herself that a lawyer was not likely to do this, unless he was well aware that lands and gold were safe somewhere in the distance.

"And title too, perhaps,—who knows?" mused the ambitious, yet romantic, Cathleen. "I doubt not that this noble-looking young man has a lineage as good as my own; better, perhaps. How abominable it seems to treat him now as an inferior! I won't. I will let him see that I consider him my equal, nay, that he is not my superior? What stores of knowledge he possesses! Then how amiable he is; what perfect command of that high mettlesome temper, which seems to be one of the appurtenances of noble blood. How his soul raged within him on that night, when the odious Lord Beechfield insulted him, and yet he put the bit upon the restive, noble indignation which rose up in a tumult against the horrible old man! Not an angry word escaped that stern, yet sweet mouth. That detestable old man, to whom my grandfather is going to sell me, Earnshaw Earnshaw, am I turning mad, that I feel inclined to abolish the creed, the worldly-creed which I have clung to since I was no higher than the table? Sweeter, it seems to me, would be a life of humble labour passed with you, in some lonely cottage, where roses clambered over the porch, and you sat writing, it may be, some noble book which shall amaze humanity," and the haughty heiress wept. Perhaps she would not so readily have loved Earnshaw, had not her grandfather insisted upon her marriage with the odious peer of Glamorgan.

She compared the two, and she began to love Earnshaw with all the impetuous warmth of her nature. She was proud, however, and her pride rebelled against this love; a constant struggle went on in the soul of the heiress.

"He does not even love me," she said to herself, on one wintry day.

She was gracefully dressed in a walking costume of rich blue velvet; she wore a hat and plume of feathers. She was walking briskly up and down a path in the shrubberies. The ground was frosted with white, as were the bare branches of the trees. A large Clumber spaniel, and a sleek grayhound, ran by her side; a more picturesque, a more aristocratic trio, it would be quite impossible to imagine.

Suddenly there crossed her path, the tutor. He was returning from shooting; he carried a bag well filled with game. Albert Viner followed close upon his heels; Cathleen thought what a splendid form the tutor's was, shown off to perfection by his short velvet shooting-coat. She called out to him:

"Good morning, Mr. Earnshaw; you have been out early?"

"Since eight o'clock," returned Earnshaw, taking off his hat to Miss Lamotte.

"And you are a good marksman, too," continued Cathleen, anxious to prolong the conversation, for Earnshaw was hurrying off.

"He is just about a regular good one," put in Master Albert, who, since the arrival of his new tutor, had grown less sallow-looking, for Earnshaw gave him plenty of healthful exercise.

"I must excuse myself," said Earnshaw, bowing again. "We are going into school."

"Not till after luncheon," cried Albert. "I don't want to do lessons to-day."

Albert's disobedient mood had returned upon him; he was never very good when near Cathleen; their old antagonism had not yet ceased. To his great surprise Miss Lamotte joined with him in begging a holiday from his tutor.

"It will do you both good," she said. "You both look fagged. Albert will call James to carry the game to the house. As for you, Mr. Earnshaw," her voice trembled as she spoke, "I command you to lay aside game and gun, and walk with me until luncheon time. I am tired of a lonely walk."

"A lady's commands are always royal commands to me," replied the young man, with a gallantry that Cathleen fancied was forced.

Albert called a man for the game, and the tutor was left to pace the frosted path with the beautiful heiress.

For a short time both were silent, at last Cathleen spoke:

"You and I have been strangers of late, Mr. Earnshaw; have I offended you, that you pass me with such haste, and avoid me so upon all occasions?"

"I will shame her for her coquetry," thought the tutor.

"Miss Lamotte, you have asked me so plain a question that I am resolved, at the risk of being told never to speak to you again, to answer you as plainly."

Cathleen's heart beat quite wildly against her side—her face grew pale; the young man looking at her was touched by the expression of pain which he read in her splendid, speaking eyes. Unconsciously to himself his voice softened and his tone altered while he spoke thus to beautiful Cathleen:

"Miss Lamotte, you are one of the most beautiful women in the world, one of the most fascinating, one whom to associate with is mortal danger to the peace of a man with vivid fancy and passionate heart. I am a man so constituted that—in short, were I near you I might run mad. I might presume to forget that you are a great lady, and I am a poor tutor. I might go still farther, while we are upon the subject, I might tell you that my heart, my judgment, my reason, will acknowledge no difference of rank between those whose minds are equally cultivated. I refuse, madam, to lie at your feet and be spurned, because I am poor and you are rich; therefore, excuse me, I keep out of your way. Have I your leave to go?"

"No, no, no!" cried Cathleen, speaking impetuously, "I love—what have I said?" She checked herself. "I honour you for your words. My equal? Of course you are. I have told myself so a hundred times a day lately."

Earnshaw flushed, and then grew pale.

"Ah, Miss Lamotte," he said, imploringly, "speak not such kind words to me. Do you desire to set me dreaming a false dream, from which the awakening would be misery? Are you so pitiless? Will nothing less than my sufferings content you? Am I destined to swell the list of victims who have loved you in vain? Is not your game too cruel an one? Will the memory of the misery your witcheries have caused not weigh upon your soul in the years to come?"

"Victims," repeated Cathleen, with a smile, which had suddenly become sad and stern. "What folly is this? Victims! I have refused many suitors, truly, who came to ask the honour of sharing my expected wealth. I have never seen one genuine look of love on the face of any man who has hitherto demanded my hand. Have you forgotten that Cathleen Lamotte is reputed to be a great heiress, Mr. Earnshaw?"

"Alas, not so, Miss Lamotte," replied the young man. "Your wealth is just what I hate—"

He paused, and looked away, amazed at the boldness of his own words.

"And suppose I had no wealth?" said Cathleen, speaking now slowly, almost to herself, as much as to Earnshaw. "If I were to stand before you, Cathleen Lamotte,—poor, possessing only my jewels, my wardrobe, and about twenty pounds in cash—and I were to say to you—'Earnshaw, will you work for me, in return for my love?'—tell me what kind of answer you would make?"

At this moment the large spaniel set up a loud barking. The branches of the trees were pushed aside, and handsome Oscar Arkwright stood smiling, hat in hand, before the embarrassed pair.

"I must apologise," he said, bowing deeply, "for having disturbed you, Miss Lamotte, but I have only just arrived from St. Edmund's, and your mamma has sent me to call on to luncheon."

Cathleen's face was flushed—tears even sparkled in her eyes. Earnshaw, his soul on fire, his brain in a whirl, doubted his senses; and, at that moment, he would hardly have been astonished had the moon fallen at his feet.

He and Cathleen both walked to the house with beating hearts; each was silent. Oscar had all the conversation to himself; he discoursed lightly, and seemed to be in excellent spirits.

In the large dining-room, the luncheon was laid out with stately formality. Mrs. Lamotte lounged (as was her wont) on a soft couch near the fire; and upon a small table, her own favourite dainties were spread in inviting fashion. At the head of the table (the larger table he understood), sat Mr. Lamotte.

The proud squire slightly bent his head, when the two young men, his paid dependants, entered his presence. Earnshaw was in a state of painful, almost wild confusion, the walk to the house had not calmed

his nerves, or stilled the fierce beating of his heart. He hardly did more than return the squire's salute, very absently; he seated himself at the table and began to eat the soup which was handed to him, almost unconscious of what he was doing. The words, the tones, the looks of Cathleen intoxicated his senses, and for the moment, so it seemed, drowned his reasoning faculties, and his common sense. His blood seemed to boil in his veins, his head was in a whirl, his heart in a tumult. Surely that look in the large, dark eyes had been love? and such love as is pure, holy, self-sacrificing, in kind; such love as a man delights to see beaming in the eyes of the maiden, whom he hopes one day to call by the sacred name of wife! What had she said to him? Did he dream; or had she asked him if he would work for Cathleen Lamotte, if Cathleen Lamotte were poor, and he had her to wife?

"I must have dreamed," mused the young man. He looked down intently at the table-cloth, his plate was removed, and some game put before him, without his noticing or heeding. Cathleen was more self-possessed; women are so usually. She, glancing at the flushed, downcast face of the tutor, was in an agony to comprehend his thoughts. She did not feel sure of his love or respect; having compromised herself with what sounded like an avowal, she was wretched, until she could interpret the gloomy looks of the young tutor.

"He is a very Lucifer in pride," she said, to herself, "and I believe that he has conceived a contemptuous idea of me. He imagines that I am fickle, false, trifling; that I am for a time in love with him, and disposed to fling myself at his head. He would never take me without my fortune. Oh, yes, Sir Knight, that is the perplexing thought which knits your brow so together, and makes you cut your crust so viciously; you despise Cathleen Lamotte, but if she is really so desperately in love with you, and can dower you with her great fortune, why then, you will condescend to marry her, that she may be the stepping-stone to your fortune; but in that case you will soon learn the contrary, yet, before you withdraw, I will discover the state of your feelings, and if what I fear is the case, I will unsway all the mad words I spoke in the shrubbery. I will make you believe that I was mocking you."

Oscar Arkwright watched the two handsome, troubled young faces, and his heart leaped with the fierce exultation of a bold man, who feels he has a desperate and bold game at stake; but that the odds are in his favour. He watched also the proud looks of the haughty old squire, and yet all the while that he scrutinised these three faces, he kept up a light running discourse with Mr. Lamotte, touching rents, farms and mortgages, smiling in the meantime; a bland smile, and apparently deeply interested in the subject he was discussing. Oscar was a very clever man, he could do many things at once, and do them all well; he pleased the squire, he enjoyed the dainties at the table, with all the relish of an epicure, and he held discourse within himself during the time, and laid his plans with the cruel indifference of a stoic, who is deaf to the cries of suffering, and pushes on straight towards his object, regardless of the hopes, the hearts, the lives, which he treads under his feet during his pitiless march.

"I must quickly turn this reviving fire of love into a smouldering heap of ashes," mused the rector's nephew; "I thought I had sufficiently poisoned the mind, and hardened the heart of the raven-haired youth, who is turning over that delicious wing of pheasant as if he did not like it, the idiot! But I perceive that mademoiselle the heiress has followed him up, and made fierce love to him; what a game in life! The tutor is bewildered, he cannot believe in his good luck. Very well, dear fellow, there is no need for you to believe in it, for I will quickly make mademoiselle detest you. Women are more bitter in their resentments than men, if only you can wound their self-love, and that I will quickly contrive to do. I am amazed, also, at the expression on the face of my master, the squire; there is some reason why he is most specially anxious, and ill at ease. He gives now and then a most extraordinary furtive glance in the direction of the handsome and absorbed tutor. What does it all mean?"

When luncheon was finished, Earnshaw rose, and with a grave bow, quitted the room. Cathleen went and sat in the embrasure of a window, and looked out upon the flower-garden with a dreary face.

"I wish you would come out for a drive, Cathleen," said Mrs. Lamotte, fretfully.

"The blue sky is clouded, and it will snow soon, mamma," was Cathleen's answer, given in a sad and depressed tone of voice.

"I cannot see the use of moping in that window-seat," said Mrs. Lamotte, very fretfully.

Cathleen rose to her feet.

"I am going into my own rooms to study," she said.

And the heiress left the room, mounted the stairs, and sought her own suite of magnificent apartments. The beauty of these rooms, with their rose-silk hangings, rich bright carpets, fantastical, but luxurious couches, fine paintings, and ornaments, have been glanced at before in describing this portion of the mansion. Two of these tasteful rooms communicated with Miss Lamotte's sleeping chamber. In the farther apartment, Cathleen discovered her French maid, Fantine, seated upon a worsted stool, before a bright fire. The girl was engaged in embroidering a scarlet silk robe, with silver spangles.

"This will look magnificent, mademoiselle, on the night that you have the theatricals," cried Fantine. "You are to take the part of Cleopatra; you will look every inch a queen."

"Indeed I am tired of my Christmas personations of all those ungente and unfeminine characters," said Cathleen, sinking into an arm-chair and clasping her white hands. "They say I do them all so well. Last year I represented that incarnation of beauty and wickedness, Lady Macbeth. I don't think," she continued, speaking now, as it seemed, more to herself than to Fantine, and looking gravely into the fire. "I don't think I should like anyone I loved to see me in that character."

Cathleen sat silently looking into the fire for one whole hour, at the end of that time a timid modest rap came to the door.

"Come in," said Cathleen, and thereupon entered the fair-haired, smooth-mannered Miss Leech, the companion of Mrs. Lamotte.

Miss Leech came in with a gliding snake-like movement to the side of Cathleen.

"I hope I am not disturbing you," she said, in a soft, almost weeping voice.

"Not a bit," said Cathleen brusquely, making room for the lady on the couch.

Miss Leech sat down.

"Could I speak to you alone?" she said, glancing towards Fantine.

Cathleen signed to the girl to leave the room.

"Well, what is it?" asked the heiress. "I'm in a hurry to hear."

(To be continued.)

ADELICIA.

BY THE

Author of "The Beauty of Paris," "Wild Redburn," &c.

CHAPTER III

ALTHOUGH months had passed since that of which she was speaking had transpired, Adelia Louvaine could not refrain from trembling during her recital.

She was not a timid or easily frightened girl, and perhaps she would have spoken far more composedly had it not been that the banner of the man she so dreaded was flaunting in her sight, and to her heart it seemed as a threat of approaching evil.

The sun, sinking rapidly amid great masses of clouds, dark, red and lowering, seemed to direct his parting beams solely upon the white banner, and its golden globe, flecked with scarlet, and bearing in its centre the emblem of the Moslem faith of its apostate lord, as if to warn her of danger.

She paused in her recital, and Master Stepmore continued:

"Sir Otto returned to me when Adelia fled from him. He had remarked the look of horror she cast upon him as she heard his name, for his first words were:

"No doubt my name hath been basely maligned by idle report, for its mere mention seemed a terror to the girl. How is this, Master Stepmore? Has aught for or against the reputation of Sir Otto Dare ever reached your ears?"

"So famous a soldier will be often spoken of, Sir Otto," I replied, evasively. "Your name is not loved in England."

"He saw that his evil repute had reached even this retired spot, a fact he had not suspected until then. He bit his lip angrily, and scowled at me, saying:

"All evil reports of me are false, and this I will maintain with my sword against any noble of England. For the tattle of base-born gossips I care nothing, yet have men at my command who are ready to cudgel the life out of common slanderers. You have heard of me, then, Master Stepmore?"

"I have heard but little good of Sir Otto Dare," I replied.

"And therefore," said he, solemnly, "even you, a mere tradesman, reject my proposal? Why man, were Sir Otto Dare thrice as black as liars paint him, he would still be Sir Otto Dare, a man of rank and wealth, whose bare notice would honour your family. I would make this adopted daughter of yours Lady Dare, and hereafter she may be the Countess of Livingham."

"His presumptuous tone and sneering arrogance vexed me; yet, restraining my anger, I replied:

"My daughter loves England, and were she your wife you would take her among the Infidels, whose master you serve."

"No. She should remain in England, and I too, for I am willing to resign the office I hold," he said. "I ask no dowry with her hand, Master Stepmore, though report says you are a very rich man."

"We need speak no more upon the subject, Sir Otto," I replied, with emphasis. "I have no desire to see Adelcia your wife."

"Then you reject my friendship, Master Stepmore?" he demanded, with a face like that of a demon. "Far be it from me, Sir Otto," I replied, "to presume to say that I reject your friendship, for that would be to invite your enmity."

"You do invite it in refusing to consider my honourable proposal," he exclaimed; and I saw that he intended to terrify me with his fierce looks. "Take care, Master Stepmore, far better for you had it been that you had never been born, than make an enemy of me."

"Sir Otto," I said, "since you speak so harshly I will tell you that I do reject your friendship, and dare your enmity!"

"Right nobly said, my father!" exclaimed Sir Bertram, with flashing eyes and swelling nostrils. "Why was I not there to throw the insolent rascal from the window!"

"My son," said the merchant, "this Sir Otto is as formidable as he is audacious. Cunning, daring, desperate, unscrupulous and having immense personal strength to back all these, he is a man to be feared, not despised. Men like him are never thrown out of windows until they are dead."

"Then I would have killed him," replied the young knight, calmly. "I think one who has won his spurs in defeating those brave Irish kerns need not fear even Sir Otto Dare, were he the evil one himself."

Sir Bertram drew his sword from its sheath as he spoke, and gazed upon its broad and glittering blade with pride, for he remembered many a wild and desperate fight in which he had led the van with that trusty brand in his hand.

"You are but a young warrior, my son, compared with that Sir Otto, who has fought under nearly every national banner in Europe. Be not over rash in seeking to cross swords with a man whose sinews are as hard and as elastic as steel. Besides, your friend, the Earl of Essex, once so powerful and the favourite of the queen, has returned from Ireland in great disfavour, and there is a warrant out to imprison him in the Tower: your fortunes may sink with his."

"Not so, since the queen knows that I opposed the policy of the earl, and had incurred his displeasure. But let us speak of Sir Otto. What said he when you so boldly rejected his friendship and defied his enmity?"

"He was, for a moment, speechless with rage and surprise," replied the merchant; "but soon recovering, he exclaimed:

"Wretched hound, but for staining my hands with a dog's blood, I would cut off your ears."

"Oh, my son, I see that you are pale and trembling, and I know you are so with anger and not with fear. But such is the style of speech our nobles often use to those of our class. Not in my day, nor in yours, Bertram, I fear, will the people dare to demand their rights, but the day is coming when the blood of royalty itself shall be trampled in the mire by the feet of a revolting people. Should fortune ever place a coronet upon your head, my son, do not forget the rights of the people."

"Few rights have they," replied Sir Bertram, "when a foul villain like this Sir Otto may enter a citizen's house, and threaten to cut off his ears for refusing to wed his daughter to titled infamy. But did he go so far as to raise his hand against you, my father?"

"No; perhaps because he despised me. I know not any other reason why he did not smite me down. He harried from my presence, saying:

"You have defied my enmity, Master Stepmore; so see to it that you do not repent of your folly."

"Immediately after he and his followers rode away."

"You were well rid of the fellow," began Sir Bertram; but his father interrupted the remark.

"Rid of him, Bertram? Such men are not easily shaken off."

"It was of him I was about to speak, father," interrupted Adelcia, "when I was kneeling at your side a moment ago, but you became so suddenly excited on hearing me mention his name, that I did not say that which I intended. You, dear sir, have graciously declared your desire that I should wed your son, and, indeed, it is a desired fortune nearest my heart, for as I said I love him, and never can love another as I love him. But if by wedding Bertram I am to bring upon him and upon you the fury of this terrible

noble, should I not refuse? Read this billet, which was thrown to me over the garden-hedge scarcely two hours ago."

She placed a note in the hand of the merchant as she continued:

"I do not know who threw it over the hedge. It was tied to a pebble, and fell at my feet as I was plucking flowers."

Master Stepmore's pale face flushed very red and his hand trembled as he perused the note.

"Listen, Bertram," he said, and reading aloud:

"To the Fair and Peerless Mistress Adelcia Louvaine—Dear Lady—Those who have traduced my name are but cowardly liars, who dare not show their faces to an honourable gentleman. Was it not frank and honourable in me to first ask the consent of Master Stepmore in my suit? He rejected my proposal; why, he best knows, but no doubt because he desires to wed you to some base-born tradesman, infinitely unworthy of so charming a maiden. It is whispered by some who should know, that by birth you are far above the station in which you have been reared, and that Master Stepmore has concealed and still does conceal the truth that he may wed you to his son, Bertram Stepmore, a silly ambitious stripling who would fain be a gentleman. Some say that Adelcia Louvaine is the daughter and heiress of a great noble, an earl, or a count, or a marquis, or a baron—nay, some do affirm that she is the daughter of a duke, and, higher still, the daughter of a prince. But no matter. I love you, and for your fair self alone, caring not whether you be the child of peer or peasant. You regard this Master Stepmore as your benefactor, when, perhaps, he is your enemy, having, I do believe, as do many others, hidden you from your noble family to entrap you into wedding his foolish son—at least, so I have heard."

"Were you really the daughter of nobody, and this Bertram Stepmore a respectable young man of honourable parts, why you and he could not live happily together, for the wife should never be superior in mind to the husband."

"But this Bertram, who was too wild and lawless to remain content as a knight of the yardstick—for heaven intended him for nothing more than a master tailor—having entered the service of that mad tool Essex, is notorious for his evil qualities, being a gambler, a ruffian and a pot-house brawler. Nay, they report of him that he hath twice already wedded yonder in Ireland, and that he boasts openly of his conquest over Mistress Adelcia Louvaine, when in his cups, drunkenness being his mildest vice."

"These things I can make plain to you hereafter, as I have proofs ample thereof."

"Oh, the monstrous liar!" exclaimed the impetuous Sir Bertram, white and red by turns as he heard these slanders.

"Patience, my son, and let me read all," continued the merchant:

"Therefore be on your guard against the wiles of Master Stepmore, who hath gladly permitted his scapegrace of a son to wander abroad for a time that you may not become aware of his demerits."

"What bitter self-reproach would be yours, lovely lady, were you to wed this or any other low-born city loon, and then discover that you are the daughter of a peer—perhaps of a duke! From this mischance, and because of a pure and devoted love for your own incomparable self, I would save you. Wed me, and you will wed one who has royal blood in his veins. Wed me, and you become at once a lady of the court, in which you will shine as the most brilliant star of beauty. Wed me, and you wed rank, wealth, and station. Wed me, and you wed a gentleman of honour and fame."

"Now, if you reject me, I will visit Master Stepmore and all that is his with my enmity; for I will not permit my heart's noblest and purest desires to be put down by him—"

"Fool!" cried Sir Bertram, "he promises and threatens by turns. Sir Otto may be well skilled in wielding a sword, but his wits run wild when he grasps the pen. And yet he has succeeded in terrifying you, my gentle Adelcia."

"Oh, Bertram," she replied, "you have never seen the man. There is something in the glance of his eye, in the tone of his voice, that reminds me of such a monster as a tiger and serpent combined would be. And then, as Queen Elizabeth desires to conclude speedily some advantageous treaty with the Sultan, this Sir Otto meets with unbounded favour and influence at court, and 'tis said the noblest touch their beavers in his honour. But my father is waiting for your attention to read more."

"What! has the impudent fellow written a volume?" laughed Sir Bertram, who was too recently from the wars to fear a man whom he had never seen, and of whom he knew very little. "I hope we may have light enough to bear the end, for there disappears the topmost rim of the sun, and night will soon be upon us."

"There is not much more to read," said Master Stepmore, reading again:

"It may be, fair maiden, that you have learned to love and respect Master Stepmore as a father, and if so, you will be his benefactor by receiving me as your accepted suitor during the visit I am about to pay you—for I am able to ruin him or to advance him as I please."

"It cannot be that so worthy and sensible a lady as Mistress Adelcia Louvaine has looked upon the brawling fellow Bertram except with disgust. But, if otherwise, she must forget him; for there is that in store for his punishment which may dangle him from the gibbet as a traitor to his queen. It will not be long before the head of his master, the proud Earl of Essex, is laid upon the block; and then, should this knave Bertram dare show his face within the realms of the queen, I will see to it that he be hanged, as all such base-born traitors should be."

"But of these and other matters I will speak more fully when within the glorious radiance of the most beautiful eyes of the loveliest maiden in England."

"Soon to be with you, with authority to make you my own dear wife,"

"I am, devotedly, your slave, DARE."

"I marvel that he did not add a string of Moorish titles," said Sir Bertram, contemptuously. "Slave, indeed! He writes as if he were absolute master of all of us. But what does he mean by the phrase, 'with authority to make you my own dear wife'? What authority can he have beyond his own insolence? Does he forget that he is in England, where every man's house is his castle? The nobles may, indeed, be arrogant and reckless of the rights of those they are pleased to call the 'common people,' but these are not the days of William of Normandy, nor of Richard of Gloucester."

"Until the might of the common people of England shall have lopped off the head of a king, as evidence of their power," replied Master Stepmore, "the nobles will trample upon them and their best rights, and so it will be in France. The people of England and the people of France, the people the lords and nobles now spit upon, will some day cut off the head of the chiefs of the hereditary nobility, and then, perhaps, the hut of the peasant may have its sacred rights as well as the palace of the peer—if the common people should be merciful, and any palaces or peers be spared. You, Bertram, do not understand the threat couched in the words, 'with the authority to make.' But I warrant you, Adelcia has a suspicion of their meaning."

"Ah," she said, "I so dread the man and his ability to accomplish evil, that I am ready to suspect anything. I think he means by those words that he has authority from Queen Elizabeth."

"From the queen!" exclaimed Sir Bertram, in amazement.

"I fear that Adelcia is correct in this suspicion," said Master Stepmore, gravely. "I can think of no other authority which he may have."

"And what authority has the queen herself to interfere in this matter?" demanded the young knight, hotly.

"Ah, my dear boy," replied the merchant, "it is plain that you have served with my lord the Earl of Essex; for he alone of all of England's haughty nobles has dared to question the queen's authority, and to oppose her will. Yes, and Elizabeth boxed his ears, like a hot-tempered turgot as she is. You ask what authority Elizabeth has. Adelcia is not my daughter, Bertram, simply my adopted daughter, and should the queen see fit to interest herself in the matter, her Majesty may appoint guardians for the orphan in the name of the Crown."

"Ah, then you think that this cunning and determined adventurer has gained the ear of the queen, and is now coming here to claim guardianship over Adelcia?"

"I think he comes with authority from the queen to wed Adelcia," replied the merchant, gravely; "this 'divine right of kings,' of which poets and monarchs prate, gives her power to dispose of the hands of orphan maidens. And even if Elizabeth had not the right she would take it if it pleased her, for as the Earl of Essex told her when she boxed his ears, 'she is a king in petticoats,' and as she is the daughter of the tyrannical Henry VIII., that infamous wife-killer, what better than tyranny and cruelty may we expect from her? No princess more despotic ever sat upon a throne and her favour is as fickle as the wind itself."

"And therefore must I be content to see the woman whom I love and who loves me torn from my arms to be made the wife of a wretch whose atrocities deserve a thousand deaths!" exclaimed Sir Bertram, with fiery wrath.

"Never, father, do I believe that you will tamely submit to such tyranny."

"Not willingly, my son, nor without an effort to baffle with cunning that which we cannot hope to

overcome with strength. But the time has not come, when we of the common people may rise against 'the divine right of kings,' which to-day may be seen threatening them from the death-grin of the three hundred human heads I counted but a few days ago upon London Bridge, as I crossed it on my way homeward.

"Three hundred human heads, my father!" cried Sir Bertram, in horror.

"Aye, three hundred, and more, my son. There was not a head of them all there because its owner had robbed or murdered; and yet all had been lopped from the necks of Englishmen by the command of Queen Elizabeth, under charge of high treason. And to speak against this 'divine right' of kings to cut off heads is high treason; so let us be careful how we wag our tongues. But those heads, blackening and grinning there on London Bridge, will some day be avenged. You may live to behold a king of England dragged from a window of the palace of Whitehall, and see his head chopped off, by a decree of the common people of England. But let us speak of what we are to do to thwart the purposes of this formidable wooer, who utters threats and love-speeches in the same breath."

"Yes, and we must speak and act quickly, father!" said Sir Bertram, "for there sounds a trumpet, and now you see every scattered rider is urging his horse towards those near Sir Otto's banner. Perhaps the ford has been found, or old Walters has arrived and told them. He was in the forest when I was at his house. My horse sank exhausted at the good-man's gate, and so I used the only boat he had to cross to Stepmore Retreat."

The increasing darkness had begun to make all movements on the opposite bank quite indistinct, yet there was sufficient light to show that the horsemen were rapidly returning towards the banner, which, no longer gilded by the sun's rays, streamed out dusky and sombre: and, as its outlines were defined against the horizon beyond, its folds seemed to have changed to an inky blackness.

And so thought Adelia Louvaine, as she drew nearer to her lover's side and silently prayed:

"Oh, merciful Heaven, protect me and all I love from the power of Sir Otto Dare!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE party that followed the banner which had so excited the mind of the merchant and the fair Adelia was about a score in number, consisting of Sir Otto Dare, his secretary, who was also his standard-bearer, two persons in the garb of citizens, and fifteen men in the war-dress of the Turkish court, whose fierce black eyes, swarthy and haughty features, no less than their turbans and broadly-curved scimitars, declared their oriental origin.

All were excellently mounted; and as the cavalcade moved along the road towards the hill upon which Master Stepmore soon after saw the banner, it presented quite a warlike appearance for that peaceful and quiet neighbourhood.

Sir Otto Dare, the chief of the party, was clad in the armour of the day except that he wore a turban and a long white Turkish mantle.

In gazing at the man the first peculiarity in his form that fixed the eyes was his immense length of limb, compared with a shortness of neck and body which could not escape the charge of deformity. This defect of figure was far more apparent when he was in the saddle, especially as he had adopted the Moorish custom of riding with very short stirrups.

There was, however, no sign of a hunch upon his back, though his shoulders were exceedingly broad and square. His length of limb, depth of chest, and wealth of muscle betokened uncommon physical strength; and although there was much that was ungainly in his shape as he appeared in the saddle, there was a quick and elastic flexibility about the man which proved that he was no less agile than athletic.

The ease and grace with which he controlled his large and fiery steed spoke of years of experience as a horseman. The grasp of his left hand upon the rein was firm and skilful; while his right rested as from long habit upon the jewelled hilt of a broad, straight dagger in his belt.

Thus the form of this man, though exceedingly unprepossessing to the eye from its want of symmetry, impressed the observer with its remarkable air of vast strength combined with serpent-like flexibility.

Being heated, he had pushed the folds of his white and scarlet turban from his brow, so that every feature of his face was plainly visible. The brow was broad and low, deeply marked with sharp furrows so clearly and acutely defined that they seemed to have been born with the man rather than to have been the work of time, care, crime, and passion. His eyebrows—large, gray, and bristling—shaded darkly his

keen, deep-set eyes of a steel-blue hue, while his high and angular cheek-bones seemed to have encroached upon the eye-socket until the outer edges of his eyes were forced upward, making them fearfully tiger-like in expression, especially when they flamed with rage, and when his scowl of wrath drew his heavy brows tightly together.

The nose might once have boasted beauty of outline, but the chances of war had broken its bridge and flattened it upon his face, so that its broad, wide, and thin nostrils alone now made up that distinguishing feature of the face divine.

Lip, cheek, and chin were totally concealed beneath a heavy, grizzly moustache and beard—the latter descending several inches over his gorget, and the former twisted up at the ends, their curled points almost touching his eyebrows.

This profusion of beard served to hide a short and retreating chin and partially to conceal the unusual length of his upper front teeth—which, in repose, far overlapped his lower lip. But when Sir Otto opened his mouth in rage to roar forth hate, or wrath, or command, those great pointed teeth gleamed menacingly from his forest of moustache, like the tusks of a wild boar at bay, or the glistening fangs of a serpent as he springs forward to strike.

Taken as a whole, the countenance of Sir Otto Dare while expressive of great courage and energy, was singularly repulsive, not more from its facial ugliness than from its expression of ferocious cruelty. There was in its dark and grisly aspect that which told of power and habit of command. But little of his close-cut hair could be seen, yet enough to show that, though once as black as jet, it had become very gray. "How much farther have we to ride, Master Ramorset?" asked Sir Otto of one of the persons in a citizen's garb, as they neared that hill of which we have spoken.

The man addressed started as the knight spoke, for he had been plunged in a deep reverie for several minutes, as also had been his questioner.

"If my memory be not at fault, Sir Otto," he replied, in a tone of utter servility, while he quickly lifted his cap of brown cloth, "we are already near the end of our day's journey. I think this hill we are about to ascend is called Walters' hill; so named because one Walters dwells on the other side; and—if I err not—Stepmore Retreat lies just across the river beyond the hill. But did I not understand your high excellency to say that you had made several visits to the residence of Master Stepmore?"

"Truly, Aaron Ramorset," replied Sir Otto, in his deep, harsh voice, which in common conversation was a continuous growl; "but my visits were made upon the other side of the river, and I know nothing of this locality."

"Having been upon the other side, Sir Otto, you will recognise the vicinity as soon as we arrive at the top of this hill, which is the steepest."

Master Aaron Ramorset, scrivener and money-lender, was a very short and a very corpulent person, with a vast expanse of greasy visage, closely shaved; and was plainly ill at ease upon the proud and prancing charger he clumsily bestrode.

"Then if we are so near to our journey's end," said the knight, "we should have reached it hours ago but for your miserable horsemanship. Your horse is more heated and fretted than if you had ridden him at a gallop for hours. Spur up, and let us soon be with this fellow of tradesmen who assumes the airs of a lord."

"Nature never intended me for a horseman, Sir Otto, and though perforce I am upon this unruly brute, thank heaven, I was not so great a simpleton as to buckle to my heels those contrivances your honour calls spurs."

Sir Otto cast a glance of scorn upon the speaker, who continued:

"May the fiend take the knave who invented saddles to torture men of my habit. It is well that I am somewhat protected in being of a portly figure, for had I been as lean as some of your infidel attendants—especially that fellow with your honour's banner—my very bones would have been broken—and as it is—"

"Peace man!" interrupted the knight, "the steed is one of the gentlest of my stud, and a lady may not be afraid to trust herself upon him. Indeed, it is the animal which is to bear the maiden, Adelia Louvaine, from that emaciated dragon that has hidden her peerless beauty in his country lair. But listen, Master Aaron," he added, in a warning tone, "my followers have picked up no little knowledge of our English tongue, and have learned that the word infidel, as you use it, is a term of contempt. If you so greatly value your bones remember, too, that I have, for a time at least, professed a firm belief in the religion of Mahomet."

"I humbly beg your honour's pardon," whined the fat scrivener, who seemed to tremble beneath the fire of the speaker's eye. "Your worship must re-

member that I have no objection to the religious faith of any man."

"That may well be, Master Ramorset," said the knight, with a sneer; "for it is said that though you were born a Jew, you are now a Christian—a very pious one, no doubt, as all usurers should be. But to the business before us. You are sure that there is a ford hereabouts?"

"There used to be, Sir Otto, though many years have passed since I journeyed here. If Carl Walters be still alive he will be ready to point it out to us."

The banner-bearer, who rode several paces in advance of the party, having by this time reached the summit of the hill, halted, and the breeze catching the silken folds of his standard, spread them forth flauntingly, so that it was readily perceived by Richard Stepmore, as has been related.

Sir Otto and his party were soon around it, and there all halted for a moment to gaze upon the scene before them.

"Ah," said Sir Otto, as his eyes sparkled with recognition of the locality, "that is indeed the abode of the fairest maiden in England, and if I mistake not, there are two or three persons near the summer house."

"Very true," said Ramorset, "and though the distance is too great to allow their features to be distinguished, it is plain that one of the three is a female, as I judge by the flutter of her robes and scarf."

"Perhaps it may be the fair Adelia herself," remarked Sir Otto, eagerly, as he strained his eyes towards the summer house. "Now, if it be she, I hail it as a happy omen that her lovely form should be the first to greet my eyes. I have with me one whose sight is a wonder, and practised in noting objects at a great distance on the burning sands of the Arabian deserts."

He made a sign towards the banner-bearer, who immediately rode up near his master and awaited his commands.

"Omrah," said Sir Otto, in the Arabic tongue, "your sight is the wonder of the East. Tell me what you see notable about yonder garden retreat."

The banner-bearer gazed steadily for a moment, and replied:

"There is a couch or settee, upon which sits a man of feeble appearance, my lord."

"Aye, that is our man," exclaimed Sir Otto. "That is Richard Stepmore, no doubt. What more?"

"Near him stands a lady, my lord, whom I judge to be fair and young, with a scarf of blue and gold or silver over her shoulders."

"It is she!" cried Sir Otto, triumphantly. "I have seen her wearing such a scarf. So my dream was false, for all it has pressed heavily upon my mind all this day. I dreamt that I was about to wed the fair Adelia, and that as the final words trembled upon her tongue, some invisible hand struck me down and bore her away from my sight forever. What more, Omrah, for there is a third person there?"

"Yes, my lord, continued the keen sighted Arabian. "The third person is a man in the dress of those who stand about the palace of her majesty, and he wears the cap, plume, and scarf of the royal body-guard. The sun shines broadly upon him, and I see that he is a man of stately presence, for he towers head and shoulders above the lady at his side."

"And she is tall, said Sir Otto, reflectively. "I know not who this gallant in court-garb may be."

"Perhaps some gay butterfly of the city or of the court," remarked Ramorset. "The fame of the maiden's beauty has spread widely abroad of late, and also the rumour that Master Stepmore intends to bestow a great dowry of gold and of jewels upon his adopted daughter when she marries."

"That may be," replied Sir Otto, spouting. "It shall be my delight to break the wings and burn the plumes of all such gay butterflies, if they dare flutter around Mistress Adelia."

He gave some order to his retinue, and while several of them rode away towards the river, two others directed their course towards a small cottage near the water's edge.

"I have ordered search to be made for the ford, while two of my followers make inquiries at that cottage for Carl Walters. Was that the name of the man?" he asked, as he again addressed Ramorset.

"True, your worship, and that is his cottage," replied the latter. "But if his habits be as of yore, he may be abroad in the forest there below, or in the fields above."

"I would I knew who that gallant is," observed Sir Otto. "Can you not remember where the ford was, man?"

He spoke impatiently, for the sun was rapidly descending, and as the river was swift and swelling to cross it after dark would be a perilous as well as a disagreeable enterprise.

"As I had the honour to inform your excellency," replied Ramorset, somewhat alarmed by the sharp tone of the other, "years have elapsed since I travelled hereabouts, and though the ford was im-

diate opposite the cottage, Walters related that it was shifting from year to year, and that when the river was very high no ford existed. Your honour will do us the justice to remember also, that I advised you to take the upper or the lower road and cross in boats."

"Aye, I know," growled Sir Otto, "and thereby we should have arrived at our journey's end after midnight. The maiden has not overmuch liking for me as it is, and were she awakened between midnight and dawn, and forced to mount a horse at my desire, my faith! her dislike would become hate."

"It is not for me to advise a greatman like Sir Otto Dare," said the scrivener, cautiously, and he would have said more, had not the fierce knight exclaimed: "Then see to it that you be chary in giving advice to Sir Otto Dare. I know what you would say, Master Aaron—that it is rash for a man to wed one who dislikes him. But I think I shall soon persuade this rustic maiden to endeavour to love me. Once my wife, I care nothing for her whims. You have aided me in obtaining from the queen my authority to assume guardianship of Adelia Louvalne, and for this you will be well paid. You have some spite against Master Stepmore, and so you have accompanied me that you might exult in beholding his chagrin; and that exultation will be your reward for acting as a very poor guide. But remember to keep your advice between your teeth, or they and your meddling may be forced down your throat."

Master Ramonet, perceiving that the knight's jealous rage against the unknown gallant was about to be vented upon him, very prudently made no reply.

(To be continued.)

FACETIE.

SOMETHING THAT HAS SET THE WHOLE MUSICAL WORLD IN A BLAZE.—The new pitch!—*Tomahawk.*

The Lords of the Treasury have issued a notice that they are willing to buy up all acceptances of clerks in the Civil Service at par. This is something like benevolence.—*Tomahawk.*

OWING to the complaints that have appeared in the Times on the subject of the late and non-delivery of letters, the office in St. Martin's-le-Grand will change its name to the Paulo-Post Office.—*Tomahawk.*

We hear that thirty clerkships in one of the departments of the Civil Service are to be at once suppressed, in order to enable Mr. Gladstone to carry out his promised scheme of retrenchment. We confess that to us this sounds like the carrying out of the heroic resolution of Mr. Winkle, who, after announcing that he was going to begin, made a terrific onslaught on two small boys. We have not heard that Mr. Gladstone's passion for economy has urged him to propose the suppression of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, or the Lord Privy Seal, though the nation could do perfectly well without either, and the saving of these two superfluous Cabinet officers would considerably exceed that resulting from the shelling of the thirty poor clerks.—*Tomahawk.*

LET RIGHT BE DONE.—And give a flourishing Midland Counties town of world-wide reputation its due. It is but just to state that, at the late election Burton was not in a state of ferment.—*Punch.*

A THOUGHT AT A DOG SHOW.—To award the prizes in the terrier classes must be anything but a sinecure. Have not the judges to take "the rough" with "the smooth."—*Punch.*

THINK OF YOUR HEALTH.—PAINTING ON DISCUIR.—The opinion of the Medical Profession is earnestly requested as to the injury likely to be done to the coats of the stomach by such a mode of preparing an agreeable article of food, which has hitherto been looked upon as perfectly innocuous.—*Punch.*

OUR NATURAL EFFECT OF GRAVITY.—The *Saturday Review* thinks that we ought all to be, if not miserable, grave, this Christmas, because we do not see the future of our paupers and our peers. Well, let us see. Suppose we begin by making all paupers into peers. Then the "gentle" class will at once make open house for their lordships, lend them money, marry them to their daughters, and set them straight with the world. That's soon settled. But what's to be done with the peers? We don't want to make them paupers, though a good many of 'em have chosen to perform that transformation for themselves. It is as politicians that the *S. R.* is afraid for them. Come, as they have not committed any particular crime of late, suppose we copy the language of *Escalus* on an alleged sinner, "Even let them continue in their evil courses, till thou knowest what they are." We are always ready to be grave at the shortest notice, but only that we may see how

to get rid of the reason for gravity! Haven't we done so in this case?—*Punch.*

MUSICAL.—The *Musical Times* says that the lowering of the musical pitch in England is about to assume a practical form. We are glad to hear it, for there is a great deal of musical pitch which defies those who touch it. It would not be a bad beginning of the movement to abolish the per-centage to singers. The next best step would be to abolish those critics who have been tarred with the same brush as—well, never mind.—*Punch.*

THE FAIRY AND THE THREE WISHES.

An Oriental Tale.

A FAIRY, of the friendly sort,
Who serve mankind as if in sport,
Know how to wash and sweep a room,
With twirling mop and whisking broom;
In garden work are skilful too,
And apt in all that husbands do—
But if you cross them—lo!—they cease
Their industry with strange caprice,
Or, more perversely, quickly spoil
The product of their former toil.
A fairy of this curious kind
(Which still in merry books we find)
Had aided long a farmer's skill
His land to plough, and plant and till,
Until the honest yeoman grew
Not rich, indeed, but well-to-do,
Thanks to the fairy—nimble sprite!
Who served his master day and night;
(For still the fay his vigils kept
While master, man, and mistress slept,
Until at last the vagrant mood
That ever rules the goblin brood,
Was his no more; he fain would dwell
With those whom he has served so well;
For to the giver kindness makes
A joy surpassing his who takes.

But now, alas! (and hence we see)
That fays have griefs as well as we,
An order from the Fairy King
Came, with an escort, charged to bring
The farmer's favourite, that he
Might straight attend his majesty
At Land's-end!—he would have it so,
And so, perforce, the fay must go.
But ere he left his rustic life,
He bade the farmer and his wife
Three several wishes to express—
"Just three," he said, "no more—nor less,
And these will I at once fulfil;
Whatever, my friends, may be your will!"

The first was sure an easy task;
For wealth—vast wealth, of course, they ask.
It comes!—and with it all the train
Of ills that vex the heart and brain
Of those who pay the taxes which
(Beside the king's) annoy the rich,
Thieves, swindlers, beggars, borrowers, all
That plunder parlor, kitchen, hall
By various arts—force, fraud and lies!
"Take all away!" the farmer cries,
The poor are happier than they;
Who to such harpies fall a prey;
Oh give us back, dear sprite, once more
Contentment and our humble store!"
Two wishes gone—to bring the man
And dame just where they first began!
At thought of this they laughed outright;
So did the fairy (sprightly sprite!)
But ere he went, with friendly voice,
He helped them to a better choice:
"Twas Wisdom! riches of the mind,
Surpassing all that misers find
In money-bags; abundance rare
And void of grief and carking care—
Wealth—if it bear the genuine seal
Which none can borrow, beg or steal!"

J. G. S.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

HAIR DYES.—Dark dyes for the hair are generally composed of acetate of lead and sulphur, and consequently cause paralysis. Almost the only, if not the only innocuous dark dye, is a weak solution of acetate of iron mixed with glycerine, which writers on those subjects say gradually darkens the hair, and has no effect, except as a slight tonic.

POULTRY CROQUETTES.—CROQUETTE DE VOLAILLE.—Melt a bit of butter in a stewpan; put into it chopped parsley and mushrooms, two spoonfuls of flour, salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Fry it, and pour in stock and a little cream. This sauce ought to have the consistence of thick milk. Cut up any poultry, which has been cooked the day before, into dice. Put them into the sauce and let it get cold. Form it

into balls, and cover them with bread crumbs. Wash these in eggs which have been beaten up, and roll them in bread crumbs a second time. Fry them to a good colour, and serve with a garnish of fried parsley. Croquettes of veal or rabbit may be prepared in the same way.

STATISTICS.

THE whole number of sovereigns coined in 1863-4 was 14,578,000, and in March last 600,000 of them were still in the Bank of England unissued.

THE *Monitor* says that, taking one year with another, not less than 30,000,000 francs' worth of sweetmeats are annually made in France. As the exports are under 8,000,000 francs, this leaves 27,000,000, or nearly 1,100,000*l.* sterling, as the annual value of home-made sweetmeats consumed by the French people. To this have to be added 100,000*l.* or 200,000*l.* worth of "cheap sweets," manufactured by steam, and imported from England into France.

REMARKABLE PAUPER STATISTICS.—Pauperism in London has just doubled itself within the last ten years, the number relieved in 1858 being 71,513 against 182,400 in 1868. This lamentably progressive increase is still going on, and the population has physically degenerated. The extended charity serves, instead of checking, to increase and intensify the evil. In the metropolis the enormous sum of 8,504,640*l.* is expended every year in charity—a sum equal to 4*s.* 8*d.* per week for 800,000 persons!

GAMING AT SPA.—A bill is now before the Belgian Chamber of Representatives to abolish gaming at Spa from the year 1870. An account of the receipts and expenditure for the past season, as verified by the Court of Accounts, shows what immense chances are against the players. The losses at the roulette table amounted to 37,851*fr.*, and the gains to 939,641*fr.*, or a balance of profit of 902,810*fr.*; for the trente-et-un the figures are 380,869*fr.*, and 1,238,864*fr.*, or a net produce of 857,995*fr.*, in a period of three months only. The share of the Treasury in the profits was 848,560*fr.*, or 155,108*fr.* more than in the previous year.

IN 1855 the number of silk looms at work in the canton of Zurich was 25,290, employing 32,862 weavers. During the most prosperous years of the silk trade, from 1858 to 1860, the number was 28,000, employing 37,000 weavers. Since then there has been a great falling off in this manufacture, and in 1867, though more active than the preceding years, the total number of silk looms was only 18,276, employing 26,883 weavers; and, although this trade is gradually improving, it will be many years before it regains its former prosperity. The total value of silk stuffs manufactured during 1855 was 8,291,406*fr.*, and in 1867 it amounted to 7,279,810*fr.*

MISCELLANEOUS.

DURING last year 169 new pieces, including the pantomimes, were produced at the metropolitan theatres; and 59, exclusive of pantomimes, in the provinces.

BEFORE leaving Stockholm, the Prince of Wales was made a Knight of the Freemasons of Charles XIII., after having successively received the six inferior orders.

THE planting of trees on the Thames embankment has been commenced. The trees are placed at intervals of about twenty feet from each other. It is intended, when the embankment is completed, to plant trees throughout its entire length.

A PARISIAN journal says: "The Princess Mathilde is having a model farm established in her park at Saint-Gratien. It will be on a large scale, and in accordance with the suggestions of the Princess Baciocchi, who has sent there some small cows without horns."

THE English Government has acquired property in a tract of 1,652 acres which the late King of the Belgians added to the domain of Claremont, of which he enjoyed the life interest. His Majesty's heirs allowed the civil list to become the purchaser for 91,887*l.*, although a proprietor of the neighbourhood offered them a much more considerable sum.

OBITUARY OF NAVAL OFFICERS.—The deaths of three naval men are recorded. Commander Richard Lock Connolly, well known to Bath men, died in that city on the 4th, in his 84th year, being one of the few survivors of the battle of the Nile. Captain John Sibbald, R.N., who has just died at 59 years of age, was one of Sir John Ross's companions in his Antarctic expedition. Admiral Charles Warde, whose death, at 83 years of age, is announced, was a Knight of Hanover, but was not on the active list of the Royal Navy.

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

EMMA HOPE.—The Ducal family of Portland pronounce their name as spelled, "Bontinck."

PELICAN.—We do not admit such advertisements in these columns. Advertise in the daily newspapers.

A. WIDOW.—We cannot advise you without perusing the will. Why not consult a solicitor? 2. You must administer.

THOMAS MORTON.—1. Apply by letter to Mr. Solomon, of Albemarle Street. 2. The fees, we believe, vary according to the means of the patients.

J. J. J.—We think not; but under the circumstances you should consult a solicitor, as much depends upon the wording of the indentures.

MARK.—A "Wicket" is a small door in the gate of a fortified place, affording a free passage without opening the great gate.

H. T.—Mrs. Felicia Dorothea Hemans, the poetess, was born in 1793, and died in 1835. Her life was written by H. F. Chorley, in 1837.

A. COCKNEY.—When you arrive in the country, apply to the British Consul, who is bound to afford you any information. The cost of transmission would be but trifling.

A. LONELY HEART.—1. The length of the voyage entirely depends upon your choice of a steamship, or sailing-vessel. The days of sailing, freight, passage, &c., are advertised in all the daily newspapers. 2. Handwriting very good.

Q. E. D.—There is a shilling book published, entitled "One Thousand Practical Receipts in the Arts and Sciences, Trade, Manufactures, Chemistry, Domestic Economy, &c.," which you can procure through any bookseller.

BOTANIST.—There are botanical societies and gardens in nearly all the capitals of Europe, and doubtless in the United States; but we do not remember having heard of a botanical college.

AMBROSE SIDNEY.—As one of your father's heirs, or co-heirs, you can claim your fair share—no more. Why not apply to a solicitor? We cannot judge the whole merits of the case, without seeing the will.

PUBLICAN (Scotland).—You can recover the debt, we believe; but being a Scotsman, and your debt being the amount you say, why not take the advice of a local Writer to the Signet.

POETRY.—"Love's Waiting," by A. M. Bussey; "New Year's Day," by C. S.; "To a Withered Tree," and "For-saken," by Yu-lu, we are reluctantly compelled to decline with thanks.

THE WHITE GHOST.—Go to bed early, rise betimes, wash in cold water, be careful and moderate in diet, and take plenty of out-door exercise; attention to these rules will, no doubt, produce the effect you desire.

LOTTIE S.—Lottie S. is foolish indeed, in asking us whether we can tell a man's nationality by a slip of his handwriting, in red ink. Could Lottie expect us to tell her the size and quality of a house, if she were to send us a single brick?

ALFRED.—The word "Beersheba" means "the well of the oath." The spot was so called on account of a treaty made between Abraham and a neighbouring prince, which was sworn to by the side of the well.

A. W. SKEGTON.—The ingredients by which a storm-glass may be made, are 4 parts of camphor, 3 parts of nitre, 1 part of sal ammoniac, 33 parts of alcohol; dissolve, and keep it in a glass tube or bottle, covered with a bladder.

JOSEPHINE.—Interregnum is a Latin word signifying the space between two reigns or governments. The literal meaning of *advena* is strangers, foreigners, new comers to a place or country.

SYDNEY.—The "Noble" is an ancient English coin, first struck in the reign of Edward III.; it was stamped with a rose, and was thence called a rose-noble; its value was six shillings and eightpence.

G. W.—*Ad referendum* is a phrase that was introduced into diplomacy by the Dutch, and is now become proverbial, to express slowness in deliberation, and a want of promptitude in decision.

LEWIS.—Permanent alimony is more ample than alimony pendente suit; it is sometimes the third of the husband's income, at other times a moiety, and is larger in proportion to a small than a large income.

ASPA.—"Kentish Fire" was a term given to the continued cheering which was common at the public meetings held in Kent, with the view of preventing the passing of the Catholic Relief Bill, about 1829 and 1839.

W. A. Inquires the origin of the wren being carried about on St. Stephen's Day? The following particulars are given in Yarell's "British Birds." "Smith, in his 'History of Cork,' written about a century ago, remarks, as the wren makes but short flights, and when driven from the bushes is easily run down, to hunt and kill him is an ancient custom of the Irish on St. Stephen's Day. The late Mr. T. F.

Neligan of Tralee communicated the following note upon this subject in 1837: To hunt the wren is a favourite pastime of the peasantry of Kerry on Christmas Day. This they do, each using two sticks, one to beat the bushes, the other to fling at the bird. It was the boast of an old man, who lately died at the age of one hundred, that he had hunted the wren for the last eighty years on Christmas Day. On St. Stephen's Day the children exhibit the slaughtered birds on an ivy-bush decked with ribbons of various colours, and carry them about, singing the well-known song, commencing

"The wren, the wren, the king of all birds," &c. and thus collect money to 'bury the wren.' Mr. B. Ball informs me that this persecution of the bird in the south is falling into disuse, like other superstitious ceremonies."

EDWARD.—A gamekeeper may take game from trespassers found by day or night upon land, on first demanding it, and their refusing; but not unless they are unaccompanied persons, and he cannot take woodcocks, snipes, quails, landrills, or conies from such trespassers.

M. C. P.—We do not keep a record of such advertisements. Your only course is to get a friend in London to search the file of the Times newspaper, which you may do, at a trifling cost, at Peel's Coffee House, Fleet Street, London.

A. CONSTANT READER.—To improve the growth of the hair, dissolve thoroughly over a slow fire 2 oz. of white wax, and half-an-ounce of palm oil, with a flask of the best olive oil; stir till it is nearly cold, then add 1 oz. of castor oil and about 3 pennyworth of bergamot, or any other perfume.

A THREE YEARS' SUBSCRIBER.—To cure Ringworm, take some yellow-dock leaves, cut in small pieces, and simmer in vinegar; when the strength is extracted, strain off the vinegar, which apply to the part affected at least three times a day.

ADELIN DUNBAR.—1. Any bookseller will give you the information. 2. Do not attempt to make your hair a light colour, except by frequent washing in cold water. 3. The person who caused the quarrel should be the first to apologise, no matter whether male or female.

W. E.—There are many teachers of book-keeping by single and double entry; why not take a few lessons from one of them, the more especially since you have worked yourself up in arithmetic. Your handwriting is not sufficiently good for a book-keeper; take a few lessons in writing also.

CLARENCE.—The preservation of health is the greatest of earthly considerations; medicine will never remedy bad habits. Indulgence of the appetite, indiscriminate dosing and drugging, have ruined the health and destroyed the lives of more persons than famine or pestilence.

ELIZA.

Oh! would that my spirit were pure as the light,
That purples the hill tops at birth of the day!
A guardian angel, through the gloom of the night,
Would watch or o'er thy slumbers, Eliza, away.

I look on the disk of the evening star,
Commending its light with the fathomless brine,
So my longing spirit is wandering afar—
Afar, oh, Eliza, to mingle with thine!

And, oh! thoughts weird and sad are vexing me now,
As I look on the star in the fathomless sea;
I envy the night winds a-kissing thy brow,
But his thought must be pure who is thinking of thee.
W. S. R.

LOREY A.—If some flowers of sulphur be mixed in a little milk, and allowed to stand for an hour or two, then the milk (without disturbing the sulphur) be rubbed into the skin, it will keep it soft, and render the complexion clear; it should be used before washing.

M. G.—The sextant is an instrument used in the same way as a quadrant, and contains sixty degrees, on the sixth part of a circle. It is used for taking the altitude of the planets, and was invented by Tycho Brahe, at Augsburg, in 1550.

SHIRLEY.—Churchwardens, before acting as such, must take the oath of office before the archdeacon or other proper authority; for until they are sworn they can perform no legal act as churchwardens; nor have they any authority to expend money on account of the church.

A. CORK GIRL.—1. Your best course to pursue, will be to rise early, take exercise in the open air, and have cheerful society. 2. Your handwriting requires great practice, procure some printed copies, and attend carefully to the formation of the letters.

W. WILLIAMS.—You cannot get married in a few hours legally in London at a little cost. Why wish so to do? Do you wish the ceremony to be performed comparatively secretly? Have the banns put up at a distant parish church, complying with the rule of a certain time of residence of one of the contracting parties.

ALAN.—The word *Paratonnerre* is derived from the French word *Parer* (to ward off) and *tonnerre* (thunder), and is generally applied to metallic rods used as lightning conductors, fixed against the walls of a house, to the spire of a church, or to the mast of a ship, to preserve them from the effects of lightning.

I. M.—A Baptistery was formerly a small place partitioned off in a church, within which a large font was placed, where the persons to be baptised (frequently adults) were submerged. Previously, lakes and rivers were resorted to for immersion. Fonts are said to have been first used about A.D. 167.

FEDRO.—Policies of marine insurance are usually effected by brokers, who are employed by the party intending to insure. The broker is the agent of the assured, to effect the policy, but he is not solely his agent; he is a principal to receive the premium from the assured, and to pay it to the underwriter, and is liable to the latter for it.

SWEET WILLIAM.—1. To clear the voice before singing, make a mixture of raw eggs and honey, and take a little occasionally. 2. The Messrs. Routledge, of the Broadway, Ludgate Hill, E.C., have published a work of the kind you mention; you can obtain it by order through any bookseller. The price, we believe, is 1s.

MILLY JANE W.—To make alum baskets, take a small basket, about the size of your hand, formed of iron wire, or split willow; then procure some lamp-cotton, unsize it, and wind it round every portion of the basket; mix 1 lb. of alum

in 1 quart of water, and boil till dissolved; pour the solution into a deep pan, and suspend the basket in it, without allowing any part of it to touch the pan, or to be exposed above the surface; let the whole remain perfectly at rest for twenty-four hours, when on taking out the basket, the alum will be found prettily crystallised over all parts of the cottoned frame.

A. G.—Lunar rainbows are not uncommon but, from the yellow light cast over every object in moonlight, the prismatic colours are far less vivid, and are sometimes even difficult to distinguish at all. Lunar rainbows can also be formed on fog, and are not uncommonly seen upon the mists that rise at sunset, in clear, calm weather; they are called "radiation fogs."

STEPHEN.—Kensington Palace was originally the residence of Lord Chancellor Finch, from whom it was purchased by William III., who made the road through the park. The gardens were improved by Queens Mary, Anne, and Caroline, who died within the walls of the palace. George, Prince of Denmark, and George II., died there, and Queen Victoria was born there in 1819.

G. W. V. R.—To boil tripe: wash it clean and put it in only plenty of water, with a few moderate-sized onions; when they are quite soft, the tripe will be sufficiently done; about ten minutes before, strain off all the liquor, replace it with a cupful of milk, roll a lump of butter in some flour, add a little chopped lemon-peel, pepper, and salt; mix all well together, and let it boil gently for about ten minutes; this way of dressing tripe is cheap and delicious.

CONRAD.—Election auditors are appointed for every election, whose duty it is to take and publish an account of all expenses incurred at the election. No payment of any charge whatever in respect of any election, or the expenses thereof, can be made by authority of any candidate, except by or through the election auditor; and any payment otherwise made will be deemed illegal, and upon proof thereof, the candidate must forfeit double its amount, with 10s. besides.

MENNY OWEN, nineteen, tall and fair.

J. T. S. (in an extensive business), nineteen, 5 ft 4 in., fair, and very affectionate. Respondent must be about the same age.

MIGNONETTE, seventeen, petite, brown hair and eyes, fair, and good looking. Respondent must be tall, dark, good tempered, in good circumstances, respectfully connected, and well educated.

LOTTIE and CLARA.—"Lottie," twenty, dark brown hair, blue eyes, good looking, and fond of home. "Clara," twenty-one; dark brown hair and eyes, good looking, and domesticated; sea-faring gentlemen preferred.

ANNE and EMMA.—"Anne," twenty-six, 5 ft, brown hair and hazel eyes. "Emma," nineteen, 5 ft, brown hair and eyes. Respondents must be tall, respectable, and good looking.

ELLEN and Cissy.—"Annie," twenty-one, tall, fair, good looking, and domesticated. Respondent must be dark. "Cissy," nineteen, dark, and good looking. Respondent must be fair; a sailor preferred.

KATE, ELLEN, and SALLY.—"Kate," tall, dark, and handsome. Respondent must be a Catholic. "Ellen," seventeen, fair, and pretty. Respondent must be a Protestant. "Sally," blue eyes, brown hair, good tempered, and fond of home.

MARIA and FRANCES W.—"Maria," twenty-two, tall, brown hair, hazel eyes, and good looking. Respondent must be tall, dark, and fond of home; money no object. "Frances," nineteen, tall, dark, and fond of music. Respondent must be tall, dark, and fond of home.

WILLIAM, JOSEPH, THOMAS BLUE, JAMES, SAMUEL, and CHARLES.—"William," thirty-five, 5 ft 7 in., auburn hair, blue eyes, fair. "Joseph," twenty-four, 5 ft 5 in., dark hair, blue eyes. "True Blue," twenty-four, 5 ft 6 in., brown hair, fair, has 100s. a-year, and is fond of home. "James," twenty-two, 5 ft, light hair, blue eyes, fair, good looking, and fond of home. "Samuel," twenty-five, 5 ft 8 in., light hair, blue eyes, fair. "Charles," twenty-six, 5 ft 7 in., auburn hair, blue eyes, fair, has 60s. a-year, and is very fond of home.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

YOUNG SOLDIER is responded to by—"P. S." (a widow), tall, and thoroughly domesticated.

LUCK by—"R. S.," twenty, dark, medium height, and very respectable.

ADA FLORENCE by—"James H.," twenty-one, 5 ft 9 in., fair hair and complexion.

MOSE ROSEBUD by—"W. R."

W. AMSTON by—"Lizzy," tall, good figure, fair, and fond of home.

SWAYAWAY JACK by—"Black-eyed Susan," seventeen, dark, good looking, and very lively.

TOPSAILYARD JACK by—"Jenny," nineteen, medium height, dark, and would make a good wife.

SENIOR SHIP'S POLICE by—"Nellie," twenty-two, medium height, fair, pretty, good tempered, thoroughly domesticated, and a Protestant, but has no fortune.

FREDERICK S. S. by—"Kate Allen" (a farmer's daughter), seventeen, 5 ft 3 in., dark hair and eyes, fond of music and singing, and has a small income; and—"Laura A.," eighteen, fair, blue eyes, fond of home, and will have 500s. on her wedding-day.

FLYING STAY by—"Volley," dark, rather stout, fond of home, and respectable;—"H. K." (a housemaid), 5 ft 2 in., dark, good looking, fond of home, and good tempered;—"Polly," 5 ft 4 in., fair, good tempered; and—"G. L. H." (a housemaid), tall, good looking, good tempered, and fond of home.

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